



ISRAEL MORT

A decorative bookplate or label with a rectangular border. The central text "ISRAEL MORT" is written in a serif font on a banner that diagonally crosses the center. The banner has a decorative, scalloped border. Above and below the banner are symmetrical floral and foliate designs. The top design features a central stem with three leaves and a small heart-shaped element. The bottom design is more complex, featuring a central sunburst or star-like element with radiating lines, surrounded by symmetrical foliate patterns. The entire design is enclosed within a double-line rectangular border.



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ISRAEL MORT, OVERMAN

A STORY OF THE MINE

BY

JOHN SAUNDERS

AUTHOR OF 'ABEL DRAKE'S WIFE' 'HIRELL' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

HENRY S. KING & CO., LONDON

1876

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CONTENTS

OF

THE THIRD VOLUME.



CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE WANDERER'S RETURN	1
II. RETROSPECTION	10
III. CHILDREN NO LONGER	21
IV. FATHER AND SON	37
V. IN SUSPENSE	50
VI. EVIL OMENS	61
VII. AT LAST	69
VIII. A CHARACTER IN REVOLUTION	83
IX. IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH	93
X. AN INCIDENT OF THE EXPLOSION	105
XI. AT THE CRAIG LEVEL	114

CHAPTER	PAGE
XII. A GREAT RELIEF	128
XIII. ISRAEL'S LIFE THEORY TESTED	133
XIV. THICK-COMING FANCIES	145
XV. THE CALL OF THE FORLORN HOPE	150
XVI. THE FATE OF THE EXPLORERS	169
XVII. THE FOUNTAINS OF THE DEEP BREAK UP	180
XVIII. THE MINERS' ARARAT	184
XIX. THE FIRST NIGHT'S CAPTIVITY	188
XX. AN UNHEROIC HERO	193
XXI. THE MINERS' PSALM	203
XXII. THE ROLL-CALL	217
XXIII. CREATING A SOUL UNDER THE RIBS OF DEATH	225
XXIV. THE STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE	231
XXV. DAVID'S VOW	245
XXVI. WHY THE SIGNALS STOPPED	255
XXVII. AN ENEMY'S MESSAGE	263
XXVIII. ONCE MORE, DEAR FRIENDS, ONCE MORE	268
XXIX. ISRAEL'S CHOICE	285

ISRAEL MORT.



CHAPTER I.

THE WANDERER'S RETURN.

ONE dull, misty evening of September, some twelve years later than the period referred to in the beginning of this tale, a young man alighted on the platform of the nearest station to Brynnant ; and although to the porters and other people about he was a stranger where few strangers came, he asked no questions, even while he peered inquisitively into every face he passed, but went away with his travelling bag, as if every inch of the neighbourhood was familiar to him.

Not the less, however, did he pause, when he had got out of sight of the station, to enter a field

and ascend a little hillock, and stand there for nearly a couple of minutes ; gazing first in one direction, then in another, as if struggling with a double current of thought and emotion, one showing him things and places he had forgotten or never known ; the other recognising by sudden gleams objects unseen since childhood, but treasured ever since as precious links, binding past and future together, and which time had partially disguised ; so that for a brief space there was doubt, then glad and heartfelt recognition.

Every object, however mean or insignificant to others, seemed full of interest for him. At that dingy cottage, with the thatched roof looking in its sodden blackness as if the fingers that put it together must have done their last stroke of work centuries ago, he had once drunk a draught of milk under circumstances that made it seem ever after to him the climax of a boy's felicity in the quenching of thirst.

So with the lake of water he can just see gleaming a couple of fields off. That was where he fished for the first time in his life ; and, even

as he looks, all the boy's delight in his first success returns to him, for he sees another boy there now ; he sees the curve of his rod, the dangling quiver of something dark below—he, too, has just caught a fish, perhaps his first.

He comes to an apple-tree, and remembers both the delicious apples he got from it, and the cruel beating he received from its owner. Then, for the first time, he feels he forgives him.

He soon reaches the town, with its narrow, dark, and dirty streets ; unlighted, except from the shop-windows, which do not themselves appear sufficiently brilliant to have any illumination to spare. But the dirt and darkness are for the moment almost pleasant to him as evidences of the true place—the home—and incline him to forget newer tastes and acquired sanitary knowledge.

He breathes even the misty, grimy atmosphere with a certain air of satisfaction—though not altogether unconscious of the ugly hue it casts over everything around ; for is there not an air of indescribable joyousness in the stream of human life, that seems to bubble and dance through the place ?

A group of young men are singing finely the ‘March of the Men of Harlech ;’ the individuals who pass by him to themselves some independent snatch of song ; jest and laughter fill up the pauses between all other sounds ; and through the very centre of the moving, vivacious, but not too crowded mass, come wandering along two young girls, in the very flower of maiden prettiness, which not even their dingy dresses can hide ; heeding no one, heeded by none ; their arms so gracefully entwined round each other’s slender form, their faces so full of simple affectionateness, faith, content, and utter abandonment to the spirit of this evening hour, that the stranger, who stands aside to watch them as they pass, is irresistibly reminded of Shakspeare’s charming picture of the two that

grew together,
Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,
But yet an union in partition ;—
Two lovely berries moulded on one stem ;
So with two seeming bodies, but one heart.

‘ Can this be a colliery population ?—why it is an actual idyl of the mine ! ’ So thought the stranger ; as, with a sigh of reaction from the

delight he had felt in it all, he went on to the inn where he had settled to stay for the night.

Here his strikingly handsome face, his rich brown beard and moustaches—that gave him an air of maturity that was hardly in accord with his actual youth—his gentlemanly yet unassuming gait, and his whole appearance, at once winning and manly, caused him to be the subject of much gossip. Who could he be? What must be his business here? Such were the questions the stranger saw on every face, and at last overheard.

As if to satisfy and to silence these inquisitive folks, he took the first opportunity to let it be known that he had come down as the representative of a well-known London Mine Agency, on business connected with the collieries of the neighbourhood.

He retired to his bedroom very early; but again set the tongues of the people who were carousing below him eagerly to work, by walking to and fro while they drank and smoked, and chatted and sang, but still listened between-whiles, as if fascinated, to the continuing creak of

the floor above them, and the vibration that the stranger's walk caused through the ill-built house ; and which was still continuing when the last lingerer quitted the inn, just after midnight.

The stranger was up early, and stood entranced with delight the moment he got outside the town. Already his first impressions had begun to be subjected to analysis, and to suffer in consequence. Could this be the neighbourhood he had, ever since he left it, thought so beautiful ? Such had been the burden of his later song, as he fell off to sleep.

But now he understood it all. Last night the mountains were invisible, non-existent. Now they were circling everything within the wide scope of his eye—everywhere green, fresh, beautiful, glorious : covered to the very top with fern. Last night he could hear, but not see, the stream running below the grey stone bridge ; now it was a delight to look upon it, to gaze into its pure, translucent depths, as it rushed along singing, as of old, the song the hearer remembered so well, and so deeply loved.

As he went on—passing the mouths of one

lovely valley after another, descending from the mountain heights—as he saw the marsh, the sea, and its shipping with glistening sails—the intervening sand-banks—and the little nook where tall reeds had grown so luxuriantly, as to present all the appearance of a magnificent crop of wheat, ripe for the harvest sickle, he no longer wondered that the black trail of coal slime that covered alike town, streets, and country roads, could not spoil the life of the people. He saw that the hearts of those who sang last night were moved by a true and profound instinct and wisdom—the dirt, dinginess, squalor, were for the moment nothing to them; they, and the true world outside, were alike young and bright, and full of promise, and to be enjoyed accordingly.

But as he returned to the inn, and breakfasted, and the hours passed away, while he waited for the precise one hour about which he so frequently consulted his watch, he seemed to cease to think of the externals of his position, and to grow more serious, almost sad, as he grew more thoughtful.

Precisely at noon he went forth, and his face

grew sadder at each step which conducted him towards the place of his destination—the church and churchyard of Brynnant.

He stopped on his way to note a little waterfall, at the gorge of a narrow pass, the solemn, monotonous voice of which had for some time been ringing in his ears as he approached it. It was crossed by a rail that had dropped at one end on the ground. What a rush of recollections came back as he saw that rail! It was he, probably, who had sat there last—gazing on precisely the same rich undergrowth that filled the pass now; on the same white, bare, naked oaks, stretching their arms at intervals over the dense, tangled, winding way, winding till the eye could follow no farther. It was while sitting on that rail he had finally resolved to quit home, and it was the very vivacity of his movement—one, however, that had more in it of fear than hope, of despair than courage—that caused the end of the rail to fall with him, and suggest to his excited fancy the similar downfall of the scheme he was then nourishing.

He went on. He reached the churchyard.

Slowly he moved among the grave-stones,

striding with almost nervous anxiety over every raised spot of earth that might have been a grave, and at last, under the spreading shade of an ancient yew tree, found the object he sought.

David Mort stood before the grave of his mother.

CHAPTER II.

RETROSPECTION.

WHAT a sorrowful medley, what an inexplicable chaos, did the events of his mother's life, of his father's life, and of his own seem to David, as he stood by the grave, and reviewed them! Her tender love for him, and Israel's hardness towards them both; his father's attempt to make him work in the mine, and her help towards his escape; the grinding poverty, followed, too late for her, by material well-being; her fatal disease, and the visit she made to the metropolis, at Israel's desire, to consult the best London physicians—all that happened at that eventful visit when the wives of the two deadly enemies had met in tears, but also in hope to console each other; and when, by their loving connivance, he (David) had met Nest; and felt, in shame, how

weak had been all his boyish dreams, while he moved in the new light and wondrous glory of the dreams of his manhood, which her exquisitely girlish loveliness created ;—ah, as he thought of all these things here by the grave, how could he help the swelling bitterness at his heart, as he was obliged also to remember his mother had died without one gleam of promise that the hatreds would die out ; and that her one hope would be realised—that he and Nest would yet, by their union, reconcile all !

But there were thoughts of even a deeper, more intensely personal character than these, called forth by the sight of that dumb witness before him—that green, mummy-shaped memorial—which recalled so painfully, even while so grotesquely, the dear form of the lost one.

Her last words at parting with him had been to conjure him to renounce the half-purpose of which he had spoken to her ;—she had prayed him to shun mines and mining, as he would famine, pestilence, and sudden death.

And yet he had finally sought the very things she had warned him against. Why ?

He asked himself that question now, as he sat down by his mother's grave—asked himself with new wonder, and doubt.

What!—a lad of sensitive, kindly, studious, and half-poetic nature—such as he had gradually come to suppose he had been—*he* spend his life like a mole, grubbing in the earth, without even the mole's wholesome, cleanly soil to work in, but instead the greasy, black slime of the coal pit—he, with his actual experiences of his own disgust on the one hand, and of his cowardice on the other—he, of all men in the world, to go, in spite of nature and circumstance, to that very occupation, in the spirit of a man who sees and accepts the truth that it must henceforth be his only one, and be embraced, therefore, with something of the warmth and devotion of a bride!

David could not but laugh aloud and bitterly as he sat there in the solitary churchyard, and mused over these things.

But again he asked himself, in no mocking, but rather in an earnest passionateness of spirit, as if pleading with his better nature—with his deeper instincts, to answer him truly a question now

more than ever momentous—why he had chosen a vocation so likely to be harassing to any man, so peculiarly dangerous to him.

Was it that no other really promised so well for his individual interests, or for the restoration of his father's respect, or for the attainment of his long-cherished desire, that of rendering to his father substantial help?

Mingling with this was there not also an instinctive and manly yearning to try a fall with his deadliest enemy, Fear, under circumstances that would make success absolute?

Or was the motive after all manly shame to appear before the woman he loved, and confess he was a coward in things which other men did without thinking of them?—to let Nest compare him with the men around her, whom she saw playing the part of silent, unconscious heroes, without hope of reward, whether of the world's good opinion, or of its special material benefits?

He knew there was a something in his heart and mind, which he could only occasionally see, and then but doubtfully, that suggested his defect might not be cowardice at all; but the natural

shrinkings of a sensitive temperament from things unlovely, rude, harsh, unpleasant, and which enhanced his insight into all accompanying dangers, while greatly exaggerating them ; temperament which discipline might control, and—happily—at last conquer ?

In trying to answer these wide-sweeping questions, he once more reviewed his own history, trying to draw from it nourishment for his soul, in the undertaking upon which he had entered.

Nurtured under a continual fear of the mine he had as a boy undoubtedly grown to be a coward.

The anguish of the discovery that he was so ; the first feeling of hopelessness when he tried to throw it off, and had to begin under the stern eye and unconcealed contempt of his father ; the alternations of success and failure, in boyhood, in youth, and as a man ; the fear that ever haunted him of a final and fatal collapse if he should chance to be exposed to some great trial ;—these were the secret influences that had been at work for many years on David's character, modifying in all sorts of ways the otherwise healthy discipline of his active life after quitting home.

Then came Nest's visit to London, and an intense desire on his part to do something to assuage the ever-burning fire of hatred between their two fathers, and so also prepare the way for the union already so strongly desired by their mothers.

It was when Nest had gone, and he was left alone to ponder over all these things, that the thought came to him one day of his boyish talk with Rees Thomas, on that dreadful occasion when he first was set to work in the mine. Could he really be what Rees Thomas had suggested, a mining agent, and work for the improvement of the condition of the colliers? And if so, would he not, by the same means, have a new power in his hands, wherewith to influence his father, win him back to affection, respect, confidence—nay, might he not even thus become the instrument commercially of his father's salvation?

At first he could not but shrink from the scheme, in terror and disgust, and with the resolve that nothing should tempt him into so individually dangerous a course.

But however he let his thoughts go out in

other directions, they were always driven back by the inexorable logic of the facts, and seemed to say to him, 'This is the one and only thing you can do! Evade it at your peril!'

Then he reasoned with himself, as with one towards whom he had been too hard, too inconsiderate in judgment. He began to recal what had been done, in spite of terror, dislike, and the instinctive shrinkings of bodily sense, for mining to him was the very desolation of abomination. He had gone down at his father's demand; had stayed and worked; had complained to no one, but to Rees Thomas. So, again, he had borne Griffith Williams's whip in silence, and refused to tell his father till silence was no longer of avail. Above all, he, a home-loving, shrinking, sensitive lad, had ventured forth into the great world, knowing no one, and in extreme poverty, rather than be a witness against Mr. Williams. Were these not acts of courage? Why, then, must he ever be harping on the same string of self-doubt, self-accusation, self-abasement?

He would do so no longer. He would accept the fate to which he was called. He would

spend his leisure hours and his spare pocket money in mastering the rudiments of scientific mining knowledge; and, when that was accomplished, would get some man of repute to take him as a pupil, and accept hard work in lieu of premium.

He decided upon doing this; but even in doing so felt, as men have been known to feel in facing some extraordinary danger, a desire to shut the eyes, and rush blindly on. He, too, felt he must shut his eyes, until he was committed beyond possibility of recall.

He began, he grew weary, depressed; he stopped.

For one week only. Then with a new sense of vigour he began again, and never afterwards faltered.

By degrees he obtained some reward. The study fascinated him. He saw, that as men had already begun to discover that the very oldest of the arts, agriculture, was the one about which they knew the least, so in the ancient art of mining, everything remained rude, primeval, strong; but chaotic, reckless—successful only in

producing coal; but obtaining that in a manner degrading and dangerous to the labourers, and accompanied by an average death-rate that ought to be esteemed disgraceful, in the last degree, among a brotherhood of Christian men.

Slowly did he thus prepare himself for the work of the future; and, while doing it, felt the conviction grow upon him, he was morally strengthening in character, and that physical apprehensions had less hold upon him. But even as he felt this he trembled, and turned away from the subject, not daring to dwell on it.

He became a favourite with his employers, and thus was often entrusted with matters of importance not usually assigned to one so young. But he came out of all such trials well; and, in one or two instances, he received the special thanks of the firm.

About this period a report in a newspaper attracted his attention to his father's name. He read with pain and sorrow the paragraph.

It showed that the lull in litigation had come to an end, that the old hatred was bursting out with new fury, and, no longer satisfied with local fame, was about to appear in a supreme court.

What could he do? After long pondering, he

made a business excuse to call upon the London firm that had the management of his father's cause. The moment Israel's name was mentioned, the solicitor said, with visible irritation,

‘I am quite tired of the whole business, and wish somebody else would take it out of our hands. And now he wants capital to work the mine ! Well, I could get it, but only to ruin alike lender and borrower, for Mort will not keep out of the law. It has become a more needful kind of meat and drink to him.’

David, seeming to be interested only in the business aspect of the affair, went back to his employers, and then told them, for the first time, his true name and story ; spoke of the value of the mine ; and the upshot was a transfer of the cause to his employers ; and his being sent down to see and judge for himself, to make a careful report, and meantime to avoid committing them in any way to an actual promise to advance money.

It was also understood between them, and to the convenience of both parties, that David should, for the present, preserve his assumed name, and be known only to his father as their representative.

These then were the influences that had finally brought him back to his own native village, under a new name.

Well, he had committed himself for life. And must now test himself, by a descent into his father's mine, and by prolonged stay there, for the purpose of an exhaustive examination ; one that could not be free from hazard ; for the mine was well known to be in a state of dilapidation and danger, compared to which the state under Jehoshaphat, when he left it, was that of a model of order and safety.

As he dwells on these thoughts, two opposing currents of feeling and aim seem finally to sweep all else out of his soul as he strives to concentrate his powers for action—the one, of great hope of doing good to the two families, and of winning Nest, by his attitude, labour, advice, and position ; the other of apprehension whether the old alarms will not return upon him, should there be any, the least signs of danger, and so make failure a thousand times more disgraceful. Well, he again reminds himself, he is committed to his course, and must abide the consequences.

CHAPTER III.

CHILDREN NO LONGER.

As David rose to go away, and did indeed move a few steps onward, some impulse of remorse brought him back, as if to confess, in tears, how much he had thought of himself, how little of her and that tender nature, which adverse circumstances had so chilled, that lay beneath the sod.

He gazed on the grave, and on the pretty flowers growing over it, and on a few loose ones, now faded ; which, however, he saw must have been placed there within the last few days, and he wondered whose could have been the loving hands.

For a moment the wild idea passed across his mind that Nest perhaps came here ; but he dismissed it with a shrug of contempt for his own

egotism as he became conscious that to him Nest's supposed visit had really meant continued thought of him.

Suddenly he heard the low, sweet tones of a woman's voice singing to herself, and approaching the place where he was.

He could not see her, for she was concealed by the gnarled and decaying trunk of the grand old yew, now a ruin, but which may have once formed a veritable armoury for the bows of Welsh patriots, in days when fire-arms were not, and when Wales and England were at constant war, or preparing for war.

A peculiar smile illumined his face as he heard the sounds, and when it passed away, left there a deep colour. He stepped behind a tomb and waited to see if he were right in his divination as to the person.

A fair young creature, about twenty years of age, soon came out from the shadows behind the yew. A basket of pretty form, woven by herself from reeds, was in her hand, and the basket was full of flowers and ferns.

She came to the grave of Mrs. Mort, knelt down

by it, and began to remove the decayed flowers, and replace them by fresh ones. Then, with a little trowel that lay in the bottom of the basket, she planted her ferns.

She did this, speaking the while not as if she earnestly felt she had something particular to say, but because such speech seemed to have become a habit, a necessity to her, as relieving the too great exuberance of her gladness, or at times the too deep depression of her gloom.

‘No, no—I shall trust you no more, you idle, garish things, that are so bright and winning just while people look at you; but when they are gone forget all you were told to do; just as if it were you who were to be tended and worshipped, and who must sulk and die when you find nobody minds you!’

‘Ah, my ferns—you are beautiful; and will not fail me. But I must come and come again to look at you, and see you grow, even if I forget the dear one who lies beneath. Ah, that I shall never do!’

Was David right in thinking there was a change—one of deep significance and sweetness for him

—in the tone, when Nest uttered those last words after a long pause and sigh?

Whether he was or no, he left his ambush and advanced softly, so softly that for a few paces she remained unconscious of his presence.

Then as a humble bee buzzed right against David's thigh, she turned at the sound, but still unexpectantly; then flushed at the sight of the stranger, rose hastily, dropped her veil, and turned to go.

'Nest!' cried a deep rich voice after her.

She turned, gave one earnest, inquiring, and for the moment, hesitating look; then, with a cry of joy, advanced towards him, but stopped ere they met, and faltered out—

'David!'

'And yet you did not know me!'

'No, you are so altered.'

'For the worse?' David asked, and looked as if solicitous about the answer; but seeing the heightened colour in her face, his own grew of the same hue, and for a moment both were silent.

'May I walk with you—homewards?' he asked,

as soon as he felt sufficient control over his voice to speak.

‘Oh, yes ; mamma will be so glad to see you, and papa is away.’

They walked on silently through the church-yard, and then made for the nearest footpath that led through a narrow part of the wood, across the slope of the mountain towards the Farm.

Passing through the wood, there needed but a casual word to recall for both that day of their childish happiness—and childish trouble—when David had so unwillingly confessed to her his feelings about the mine ; and that other and dreadful day, when she had seen David under the lash of her father’s whip. But from these recollections there came but one thought now—that of their childish love—and with that the conviction, whatever it might bring in its train, they were and could be children no longer.

Presently they came to a stile. Here for the first time this morning their hands met, as David helped her over, and each felt how tremulous was that of the other.

As she paused for a moment, standing on the

top bar, poised, and looking timidly and doubtfully down, could David help thinking her the very loveliest and most graceful creature that God's bounty had ever given to the world? Need we be surprised at his fancy that if a sculptor of true insight into the capacities of his art could see her at that moment, he would passionately entreat her to stay, though but for a few moments, while he caught some dim, imperfect, but precious memorial of so happy an artistic accident?

All that was in David's face, was soon reflected back in Nest's.

As their hands had met, and felt as if they could be content never again to sever, so now their eyes met, in mute, tender, delicious eloquence, and parted not; till, for both, life's most profound, most enchanting problem was solved; and so solved as seemingly to leave nothing more to be desired on this side the grave.

Nest Williams was in truth a charming development of a simple-hearted, single-minded woman, pure, sweet, laughter-loving. She did not draw these qualities from reflection or principle, or from the training her childhood had known.

Neither of her parents had been able to help her much in such ways. But they had loved her, and she had loved them passionately in return, and thus the way had been opened for her to live her own natural, spontaneous life. She reminded you of a beauteous wild flower that you come upon unexpectedly by the wayside. A seed has happened to fall there, and the plant to germinate, in a most felicitous spot, where soil, aspect, and temperature, wind, rain, sun, and dew have all, individually and in combination, been fitted to supply its every want.

As a child she loved David ; and love grew with her growth, unthought of by her, but not the less real and strong. That very business of the mine which had been so great a trouble to the boy, and of which he had felt half ashamed, in even telling Nest about his father's cruel behaviour, had only helped him in the girl's faith and imagination. So that while he, self-cast on the great world, thought only of her as a far-off thing, that might or might not be of import at some future day to him, but was only occasionally remembered in the meantime ; she, on the

contrary, had dreamed and dreamed of that bright but timid boy, who had scolded her in the little wood, till she again met him in London at a most impressionable age, and the dream became for her evermore a fixed reality.

Together they roamed along ; forgetting the Farm, forgetting time, forgetting duties that, on David's side at least, admitted of no delay ; prattling of they knew not what, nor cared to inquire into ; but chiefly of the flowers that bloomed profusely about them, and from which, in all their beauty and mystery of structure, the transition was so easy to that still more wonderful, more divine flower that blossoms perennially in the heart of man—love ; and of which the love felt by the lover is but one form, one manifestation, though, doubtless, the most exquisite ; and of which all forms are but links, binding us ever fast to Him of whom it has been said ‘ *God is love.*’

At the Farm they found a little group of persons assembled in the yard, examining a new horse that had been bought for Nest to ride, as soon as she had made herself sufficiently mistress of the art of riding him.

Nest, at David's desire, went quietly up to her mother, who was among them, and whispered to her the name of her companion, while adding that he was earnestly desirous no one here should know him at present except their two selves ; and begged Mrs. Griffith Williams therefore to receive him merely as an acquaintance she and her daughter had known in London, and by the name he had borne ever since he left Wales—Knight.

Mrs. Griffith Williams did as she was desired, but continued to look at David with such comical sympathy, that Nest, who divined that David's request referred to his father, strove to draw her mother away.

But David forgot his embarrassments in a new attraction. Was that another Nest he saw—a child, so like the one he left, in leaving home twelve years ago? He could not but turn and look at Nest, and then again at the child in wonder.

‘ My sister ; ’ said Nest, smiling ; ‘ and the little boy they are just putting on the horse's back is my brother.’

How these children, born after he had left

his native place, seemed to deepen in David's mind the sense of the long period of his absence, and of the difficulty of the reconciliation with his father he was so anxious to bring about !

Mrs. Williams bade Nest and David follow her into the house ; and there he had to explain all that had happened to him since the meeting in London ; and to hear, in return, much relating to his mother that moved him deeply.

David, however, soon forgot his sadness as he watched various little passages of arms betwixt Mrs. Williams and her servants ; Mrs. Williams and her domestic cares ; Mrs. Williams and her eldest daughter ; who, he soon saw, really managed everything in essentials, though the details and all the honours seemed to belong to the mother.

David was charmed to see how Nest veiled this intellectual superiority, if indeed she were conscious of it at all. For a time he was half inclined to think she was utterly unconscious ; till, at a certain critical moment, he caught just the faintest gleam of a smile on her face, as she succeeded in directly reversing an order given by

Mrs. Williams, with that lady's entire belief the change was due only to herself.

Martha was not, but should have been Mrs. Williams's name, for she was indeed troubled about many things. But then, again, she was troubled much more, if she happened to be without such disturbing causes. And through all Mrs. Griffith's tangle of will, and want of will, kind impulse, and sudden anger, faith in Providence, and practical belief that the Evil One's chief business was to worry her, Nest pursued the even tenour of her way, gliding like a silver thread through the whole, and thus giving the mother a clue by which to find herself when most hopelessly lost.

It was touching to see how Mrs. Williams occasionally caught for a moment just a dim glimpse of the truth, that she was guided, not guiding, dependent on, not looked to for strength. But the glimpse died out, and was forgotten, and things went on as before.

Returning to the courtyard, where the horse was being put through his paces, they waited till he had been sufficiently examined, and all his

points had been explained by the seller, who was present, and loth to part with an animal that had evidently been a favourite, as a mere matter of pounds, shillings, and pence. When every one of the bystanders had passed judgment, and, on the whole, favourably, there was a general movement made for going indoors; but it really was such a lazy, mild afternoon, and such a soft breeze had found its way from the sea into the yard—a soft, fresh, kindly, rustling breeze, that seemed to say to the children, ‘Come and catch me,’ and there was such a gleaming of sunshine between them and the door that seemed to urge them to ‘go,’ that everybody lingered.

Seeing the children’s reluctance to enter the house, Jenkyns, the farm servant, proposed a visit to the pups; a proposal eagerly seconded by them, and timidly by Nest, who still feared an explosion from her mother, before the servants, as to David’s identity.

The party, chatting merrily, ascended the steps hewn in the earth, and rock, and tree-roots, to the little orchard; that looked black and grimy in the sunshine, as if the trees complained they had

given fruit long enough, and were now too old to have any more demands made upon them.

In a stone hut behind the orchard Jenkyns had placed two families of pups, that their noise might not be a nuisance to the family, and a loud whelping soon guided the party to them. The little building had probably possessed a door once upon a time, or at least a doorway; now, however, access to it could only be obtained by climbing up the heap of fallen stones at one side where the door had most likely been, and descending through a little aperture which the stones had left. Another heap of stones inside served to go down by, in the interior. When the children had been deposited safely, out of damp and dirt, and Nest and David had followed, Jenkyns handed round the winking terriers, and the yet blind offspring of the sheep dog, with their long noses and pink feet; and apparently not more to the great amusement of the children than to that of Nest and David, whose hands seemed to be frequently coming together, accidentally, while examining the pups.

When the children had signified their choice of

a pup each, by tying round its neck a piece of torn-trimming from little Ada's frock, Jenkyns handed Nest and the children up to David, who assisted them all to get out, and placed them safely on the other side, wondering, as he contrasted all this with his recent London life, if it were but a dream.

The yard was still quiet and sunny as they descended the orchard steps. Mrs. Williams stood knitting at the house-door, and looking all the quieter that she had found such an occupation to take her thoughts a little off the stranger who wandered about by Nest's side. Old Dando sat at her feet, leaning his nose against her skirt. One of the farm boys was idling on the gate, and shouting over the field to the school children as they crossed the bridge, and they in reply screamed back, and now and then some one would lift a voice in reproof, and draw down upon the moralist peals of shrill and mocking laughter.

A word from Jenkyns soon brought the idler to his feet, and another sent him to collect the sheep up in the top field, whither his master soon followed.

‘Nest,’ said David to her, a few minutes later, as they again stood at the stile, ‘be not surprised if you do not see me for some days. I do not yet know how things will go with me when I meet my father, and it may be that I shall find it prudent still to conceal from him who I am. My business here is with him. He is expecting me at four o’clock, as the representative of a London Mining Agency, who have sent me down to see if money can be prudently advanced for the reparation and vigorous working of the mine. This is not exactly accident. The firm he applied to, refused him. I happened to hear of that, and, after some delay and difficulty, I persuaded our firm to undertake the business, and they have sent me to explore.’ He stopped speaking to look at his watch :—

‘Ah, Nest, what have you not made me do? It is past my time now.’

‘But will he not know you?’

‘If you did not, who saw me but a few years ago, how is it possible he should, who can recollect me only as a boy of twelve? Besides, the

fact that I come to him in the ordinary routine of business, suffices to turn his thoughts in quite other directions.'

'David, if he should discover you—and be angry—or violent—you will not forget that—he—is——'

'—Is my father. Nest, be sure of that.'

Late as David was, it was later still before they parted, and only after David had won from her the acknowledgment—faltering but sweet—that it was not their mothers only who had speculated on the theme that lay so near to both hearts.

CHAPTER IV.

FATHER AND SON.

DAVID could not but wish he might postpone till to-morrow his meeting with his father, since he was already so late. His converse with Nest had for the moment unfitted him for any other occupation than that of revelling in the recollection of every word she had uttered, every glance she had given him, and in framing out of them, and out of the picture of her form and features, an ideal being that became only too lovely, too spiritual for human life and needs.

But he had fixed a time to meet Israel; and it would obviously be unwise to allow his father to connect his first business visit to him with the idea of unpunctuality, and with the annoyance he might thus feel.

So he addressed himself to the arduous task

before him. And, characteristically, his first thought, and fear and anxiety was connected as of old, with his father's belief in his want of manliness ; the bitterness of which was enhanced on the one hand by the instinctive feeling, that the imputation had been in part true, and might yet prove so again ; and on the other by the humiliation of the contrast he and his father presented when studied together.

The sight of the paternal home stopped the mental current, and warned him to concentrate his powers for action.

Just as he reached the house a boy met him, who asked if he was the gentleman from London expected by Mr. Mort.

‘ Yes,’ was the reply.

‘ Oh, if you please, he’s at the mine, and said you’d perhaps kindly go there to him.’

David was not sorry to be spared just yet the sight of the rooms where his mother had lived and died. He quickened his steps, and, accompanied by the boy, soon reached the little counting-house attached to the surface works ; where, on the threshold stood a man, his face glowing in the

light of the afternoon sun, from which, however, he did not seem to care to shade his eyes.

Israel advanced a step or two to meet the stranger, and said inquiringly—

‘ Mr. Knight ? ’

‘ Yes.’

They shook hands, David nervously wondering if his father would notice the trembling of his fingers ; and entered the little office, where, after David had taken a seat on the only chair, and apologised for being so late, Israel set him thoroughly at his ease by begging him to let him finish a letter for the post, when he would be quite at his service.

David took care to sit with his back to the light, so that his father should not see clearly what David was very much afraid of—the play of his countenance ; and, in consequence of this, he was able to see his father in just the opposite position, with the light full upon him.

What a powerful head and face it was, thought David, as he studied it ; and what a manly form ! It was more erect than he previously remembered it ; more obviously accustomed to walk on—rather

than, as of old, to burrow through the earth—it no longer seemed to glide sinuously, but rather to dominate—tower solidly, as self-respecting, and accustomed to the respect of others.

Strength of all kinds seemed to have combined in his father. David forgot for the moment, in his instinctive admiration, Israel Mort's want of imagination—the very quality for lack of which David had so cruelly suffered in boyhood.

Israel was dressed better than David had ever before seen him, but not as if he cared any more about such trifles than in old times.

In one thing he was greatly changed, David fancied. The hardness of the face might remain for others, but for him it had died out. Every line was softened, while the features as a whole had become so expressive that it was difficult to recal their old stony or metallic blank.

Was it through the loss of his wife? Or through his, David's, own absence; or through the gradual consciousness that power and material prosperity were not the only things needed in this world, even by men like Israel?

It certainly could not be due to the bitter

litigation that he and Griffith Williams still carried on.

Yes, Israel looked softened and weary, David thought; and his heart warmed more and more towards his father as this conviction became strong.

‘And now, sir, to business,’ said Israel, as he sent away a letter by the boy. ‘Of course you’ll stay with me? Shall I send for your things to my house?’

‘Well, no, thank you, for I have already settled as to my lodging. I was so charmed as I came along with a cottage I saw—’

‘Rees Thomas’s?’ asked Israel, quickly.

‘Yes, that was the name.’

‘You couldn’t have done better,’ responded Israel. ‘They are people much esteemed. He is my Deputy.’

‘Indeed,’ said David, as if quite a stranger to the man spoken of. Then he added,

‘My principals have already, I believe, informed you by letter that they have accepted the proposal made by your present agents to transfer your legal business to them?’

‘What was their motive in throwing me over?’ demanded Israel; and it was wonderful how David felt all the old harshness of tone thrill through him.

‘You wish me to be candid, sir, and speak the simple truth?’

A faint smile passed over Israel’s face as he replied—

‘I am a bad hand at anything else. But you are a young man, and it’s natural you should be diffident. Speak out, sir, like a man to a man.’

‘Well, they were alarmed about the litigation, and its being so apparently endless; and they were much annoyed about what the judge said when the last action was decided, that it was a case that ought never to have been brought into court, and that hundreds of pounds had been spent over a contest about a bit of wild land that was not in itself worth twenty shillings.’

‘That’s true as regards my enemy, false as regards me; for that bit of land includes a slice of the mine, and must be maintained at all hazards.’

‘Well, Mr. Mort, such were the reasons why your late advisers in London wished to resign the agency.’

‘And not fear of the money advances I required for the improvement and development of the mine?’ asked Israel, with obvious anxiety.

‘Certainly not, sir,’ said David. ‘They told us they were quite prepared to meet your views that way, if you would meet theirs, by consenting to let them come to a final compromise with Mr. Griffith Williams.’

‘Which I said plainly I would not,’ said Israel, with increasing anger and irritation.

‘Precisely, sir; and therefore we took the matter up, and shall try to please you better.’

Israel looked for the moment as if this accommodating spirit came too abruptly for him to have faith in it. Like a fierce mastiff about to fight for a bone, he was as much taken aback as the animal would be, if his canine antagonist were capable of suddenly handing the bone politely to him with a handsome apology. He gazed scrutinisingly in the young man’s face; which, screened by the partial shade, bore the examination

tolerably well, and gradually recovered his genial equanimity.

‘We will talk the law quarrel over another time.’ And then he added, ‘Perhaps, Mr. Knight, like other men I have known, I may prove less obstinate when I am sure of having my own way.’

‘Just what I said, sir,’ cried David with sudden animation.

‘Indeed! You have, then, been speculating about me, eh?’ The words, and the penetrating look that accompanied them, confused the young man for the moment; who, however, managed to reply—

‘In business, you know, sir, one must try to understand the characters of people we may have to deal with in important matters.’

‘True; and the remark shows you have got an old head on your young shoulders. How old may you be now?’

‘Not yet thirty,’ said David, trusting to his beard to conceal the difference between that which his words suggested, and the truth.

Israel’s look rested on his son’s face for some moments, and when it was removed a half audible

sigh escaped the strong man, the source of which David could not but venture to think and hope was himself.

‘Your first business will be to examine the mine, I suppose?’ remarked Israel.

‘Yes; and my second to make my report to my employers.’

‘When will you be ready?’

‘Immediately—that is to say, to-morrow.’

‘Will you require assistance? Would you like me, or my Overman, or Deputy, to accompany you?’

‘I am bound to say no. Mine must be an independent report, and not only that, but must be like Cæsar’s wife, not suspected of being anything else.’

‘Of course, of course;’ said Israel, while looking, David fancied, rather blank.

David could not but notice the look, and strove to re-assure his father, by saying these arrangements would be reported in London, and must tend to strengthen the case should circumstances warrant a favourable view.

‘Have you had much experience in mining?’

You won't be offended, I hope, but I confess my surprise to find one so young sent on such a mission.'

'Early in life,' said David, steadyng his voice as well as he could, 'I hated mines and everything about them, and left my home and friends, rather than be trained up to deal with them.'

'Where did you go from?' interposed Israel, abruptly, and with his eye fixed, as David felt, on his face.

There was no help for it. He must play the Jesuit, and lie in what he meant to be a good cause.

'From Tynemouth,' he said, shocked as he heard his own words.'

'Oh ;' said Israel, his tone palpably relapsing into the state of comparative indifference out of which he had been suddenly roused.

David then went on :

'And I was a good deal knocked about the world in consequence, and more than once felt inclined to give up the ghost. But a little incident made a friend for me, and——'

‘What might that have been?’ again interrupted Israel.

‘I was errand-boy to my first employers, and one day a sum of money was missing, and I was charged with the theft; and circumstances did look black against me, for I had paid away a shilling that happened to be known by some peculiarity, and which was identified as a part of the missing fund. How did I obtain the shilling? they asked. And I could not answer.’

‘Could not? What does that mean?’ demanded Israel, harshly.

‘You shall hear, sir. They threatened me, and finally gave me in charge, and I was locked up in a horrible place, and spent a night such as I can never forget; but when I was on my way next morning to the police office, the persons in charge were overtaken by other officers, and we all went back to the station; where was my principal employer, who begged my pardon before them all, and said he knew now beyond all question I was innocent, for the guilty party had confessed.’

‘And the guilty party?’ queried Israel, as if

still dubious of the truth of the story, while inclining to wish it true.

‘Was his own brother ; he is dead now, or I should not expose him.’

‘That was the cause of your lift in life, was it?’

‘Yes. They kept me employed, but in tasks of a more and more pleasant kind, and caused me to be educated ; and then I wanted to please them, and also I wanted to get on ; and they had for acquaintances my present employers, whose chief business was in mining. I often heard them complain how difficult it was to find men with scientific training, who could give the art of mining the benefit of the increasing knowledge of our time. So I began to read mining books, and then I got interested ; and by degrees they found what little I picked up proved of use ; and at last they were so good as to allow me—under articles to them—to go through quite a course of mining studies ; and I was lucky in passing an important examination, and—and so in the end they were satisfied, and tried me practically, and there too I satisfied them, and—and—yes—that is all my story.’

‘Young man, I don’t know which I like best, the story or the telling of it. You see me perhaps moved by it. So I may tell you I had a son, who might have been just what you are—but, however, it’s too late to think of that now. Tomorrow then you will begin operations?’

They shook hands and parted.

CHAPTER V.

IN SUSPENSE.

ANXIOUSLY did Israel Mort watch for the close of the first day of the stranger's labours in the mine, hoping, when they met, to judge how far he had been satisfied with the prospect of things.

But in vain he hung about the grimy office, waiting for Mr. Knight's re-ascent, hour after hour, at the time he expected him, between four and six in the afternoon, when the bulk of the men were leaving work.

The Deputy, Rees Thomas, when spoken to on the subject, could give no further information than this : Mr. Knight had with him two persons—his assistants, evidently skilled in the technical and scientific details of mining ; that whenever he, Rees Thomas, came across them, they were all busily at work with paper and pencil, and

measuring and other apparatus ; but that their leader evidently wished not to be spoken to ; for he, Rees Thomas, confessed to have been sufficiently curious to wish to have a little talk with him, till he found that gentleman courteously but plainly intimate by his behaviour that his, Rees Thomas's, departure would be more desirable than his stay.

To Israel's great surprise, he learned, late in the evening, Mr. Knight did not intend to leave the mine at all, till he had finished ; and had accordingly sent for provisions, and for the top coats, cloaks, &c., of the three, so that they might lie down for an hour or two, when they needed rest.

‘ Well done,’ thought Israel to himself. ‘ That young fellow has the right stuff in him, after all, though he did seem to be somewhat over-impressionable.’

When the second day ended, the job was still unfinished, but there were no signs that Mr. Knight faltered in his purpose. Fresh provisions were sent for, implying at least a second night's labour.

A brief but kind note from the young man reached Israel with this last demand. It was, however, simply to thank him for various little delicacies and comforts Israel had caused to be added from time to time to their list of wants; and begging him not to trouble any more, as they had all they could with any propriety make use of, under the circumstances.

Israel could not make out from this whether Mr. Knight was really pleased and thankful at what he had done, or whether it was not, as he suspected, a hint that he would rather be freed from any favours. At all events, the note stopped all further personal courtesies on his part.

It was curious how the fact of the young fellow's choosing to sleep in the mine interested Israel, and set his thoughts speculating on the reason.

The desire to continue his duties by night Israel understood perfectly well; for then, though some labour still went on, the mine was at its quietest. No trams went knocking about, no places were inaccessible, no eyes were overlooking them, which might be made use of to report to Israel about

their doings, and so try to discover their every suspicion, fear, or thought.

But the sleeping there! That he could not understand under any other conditions than such as make colliers sometimes sleep—that is, over-fatigue, and therefore taken almost without intention.

Could he have looked into the young man's breast, these speculations would indeed have assumed new and deeper significance. It was, in a word, David's fright about the mine, and about his own possible behaviour there, that first made him determinedly shun, as far as possible, all observation; and then, through excess of fear, perform an act of signal courage; that was, resolve not to leave the mine at all till his work was done, in order that he might the sooner get out of it altogether.

As to Rees Thomas, David had of course known him instantly, and for the moment had been strongly tempted to speak to him. But fear of discovery checked the desire, and impelled him almost churlishly to get rid of his old friend's inconvenient presence, even while he yearned to

ask him about his face and the accident that had so disfigured him.

How David did master the inward swellings of heart, as he worked in that dangerous place ; as he moved on, examining the most inaccessible spots, and which were necessarily the most threatening ; as he saw places where a Fall had actually occurred, and become the scenes of sad but unnoted tragedies beyond the immediate neighbourhood ; and where the roof had been propped and made passable with the least possible expenditure of wood and labour ;—how he bore all this, while seeming to his assistants only deeply immersed in all the duties of his office, no one knew ; nor was he ever after inclined to dwell on this, the period of his greatest self-struggle, and self-sacrifice.

They finished their task before daybreak on the morning of the third day ; and when Israel came to the pit mouth at five o'clock, to see how they were getting on, he found that the man he had waited for so long, and so anxiously, was gone : he and his assistants : leaving neither message nor letter behind !

‘Looks bad!’ ejaculated Israel. ‘The beginning of the end, I suppose!’

He said no more, but his face seemed to get back all its former hard, rigid, stone-like aspect; and to utterly lose that almost indescribable sense of sadness that had stolen over it ever since the day of his first meeting with the young Civil Engineer from London.

Was it true, he had again and again asked himself, that which he had said, that David might have been just such another? Could he have had the ability, the self-possession, the modesty, the prudence, the business sagacity of this young man? Probably not. Excellent things do not so readily repeat themselves in this barren world, thought Israel. But David might have fallen short of this man, and yet have been a wondrous support to Israel.

Where was he? What doing? Could he, Israel, change and forego his long-cherished determination to make his son yield, come to him and ask forgiveness, or remain in estrangement, his very place and mode of life unknown, uncared for?

He feared this young Mr. Knight, even while he respected him. Israel had faith in his power to influence those he came in contact with for his own advantage ; but, somehow, this man, on whose opinion so much depended, had shown clearly he knew his duty to his employers, and meant to fulfil it without bias of fear or favour.

And then Israel asked himself a question that for him was something wild, grotesque, portentous—Had this young fellow any heart ?

‘He seemed to like me—to be interested in me ; and I suppose it was through that I liked and got interested in him ; and yet, though he can easily guess this capital question is one of life and death to me, he goes off without even a word or a look that may show me I have something to hope for from his report.’

A trying week of suspense followed ; one that seemed as if it were likely, unless soon ended, to seriously unsettle Israel’s methodical habits, if not modify his character.

He began to look out for the postman, and to go to meet him. On the first occasion, he made

it appear to be an accident, and so no notice was taken.

But next day, the postman found him in the same place waiting, and not troubling to offer any pretence of casualty in their meeting, for Israel merely said,

‘Anything for me?’

‘No,’ said the postman, as he passed along, wondering what letter could be so important as to make Israel do a thing he never remembered him to have done before in his lifetime. Was the mining boy, David, about to turn up at last as a man, or what?

But when a third time he was thus met, and a fourth, and yet a fifth, the postman began to feel almost as much interested as Israel Mort in the question of this expected letter, and to feel an increasing desire to apologise for not having it.

But on the sixth morning, an air of unusual elation was visible to all the people he called on, on his way to the mine, and they wondered why he was in such good spirits, the weather being so bad, and provisions so dear.

He had got the letter!

He felt sure it was the right one. It looked so large, and official, and bore such a magnificent seal in red wax, where he could read the words ‘Mining Agents.’

The moment he caught sight of Israel in the distance, he could not help a very unofficial act: he held the letter up in his hand, for Israel to see; who nodded, but, instead of advancing, sat down on a tree stump, and calmly waited.

He took it with impassive face, but with a word of thanks too, and, after a glance at the seal, put it in his pocket.

Perhaps he did this, seeing a tendency on the part of the postman, who was now at the end of his beat, to linger—nay, even to put off his official character, and have a chat with him.

That act, at all events, reminded the postman of a letter yet undelivered on the road, through an accident, and, mentioning the circumstance, he hurried off.

When he had gone, Israel took out his letter, opened it, and read as follows:—

‘Dear Sir,—Mr. Knight having made a careful

examination of your mine, has since then reported to us the result.

‘ We deeply regret to say it is, to *our* minds, unsatisfactory. While Mr. Knight felt bound to inform us how extreme was the state of dilapidation into which the mine had been allowed to fall, and the very heavy outlay that *must* be incurred before it could be safely and profitably worked, he also added, what it is but right you should know, that he was satisfied, alike from the past history and the present capabilities of the mine, that such outlay might be wisely made; and that a large annual profit would result after every deduction for interest on capital, and unforeseen contingencies.

‘ We wish we could share this view. We had really desired to carry out the matter for you, in spite of the embarrassments accompanying Mr. Griffith Williams’s part-ownership, and hostility to you and to all your efforts for re-organising. But with every confidence in our young engineer, we think he overlooks the danger that, it seems to us, exists *now*; and which may on any day, or hour, perhaps result in some overwhelming

calamity, before the work of reparation can be so far advanced, as to make the undertaking ordinarily safe.

‘We must, then, though with extreme regret, decline to proceed any farther in the matter.

‘Mr. Knight’s report to us is quite at your service, if you think well to use it, in trying elsewhere.

‘We are, Dear Sir,

‘Yours respectfully,

‘EDWARDS AND MORGAN.’

CHAPTER VI.

EVIL OMENS.

ISRAEL sent for the report offered, had copies made of it, began again with renewed energy to seek for capitalists and capital by its aid; but all the while the iron had entered into his soul; he was, in fact, at last hopeless.

If—he reasoned to himself—men who were so strongly inclined to help him as this Mr. Knight and his employers evidently were,—if they could not help him, was it likely any others would?

The answer was simply, decisively, fatally, No!

He was sitting one night after despatching important letters in various directions, when his aged housekeeper came in, and began to tell him of things the superstitious colliers had been telling her, and which had made her uncomfortable. One was that a pigeon had lighted on the sheaves

of the pulleys over the shaft of the mine the other morning, and excited so much alarm among the colliers, that they refused to go down, and said they were sure something was going to happen.

‘Anything else?’ demanded Israel in quiet scorn, which put the old woman—herself half a believer—on her mettle.

‘Well, Mr. Mort, you may laugh, as you always do, at such tales, but the cocks have been crowing just before and after midnight last night, and the night before, and the night before that, and everybody knows that’s a sign of warning that somebody’s going to die.’

‘How can you be such an old fool?’ was Israel’s ungallant and only comment.

‘Why, didn’t the wife of the foreman of the smiths die lately; and didn’t the cocks, that couldn’t possibly be quieted while she lived, stop directly the breath was out of her body? The husband killed one in his anger and fright, but the rest went on all the same till she died, and then were mute. Ah, Mr. Mort, if you would only read your Bible you’d see things differently. Think of St. Peter and his cock crowing.’

Israel got up and walked about, partly to silence the drivel of the old woman, partly to dissipate the gloomy feelings that affected him, before she should be silly enough to fancy he was influenced by what she had said.

A knock at the door came like a relief.

‘Come in!’ shouted Israel, who made it his pride to be as homely and accessible as ever to his workpeople and neighbours.

It was Rees Thomas, the rebellious Deputy of twelve years ago, who came in; looking wonderfully strong and well, and showing the same resolute front, that seemed to fear nothing but God, and to find *that* fear ever swallowed up in the perfect love that casteth out fear:

‘Mr. Mort, I have a word or two to say, that you will own must be prompted by honest conviction of their necessity. After the young man from London had left the mine, I felt a strange inclination to go all over it, following in his track. What I expected to discover, I cannot possibly explain, but I did find marks of danger, placed by him at different points, in districts where we seldom go. This made me anxious and careful.

The upshot is, the mine is just now dangerous—decidedly dangerous. The gas is bad in places where none ought to be, and——’

‘Pooh, pooh! nonsense.’

‘No, it is true. I know my duty, and now venture once—and once only—to say this to you; but I have spoken, and shall speak to no one else, because I know you do all you can, and yours is the responsibility. I beg to wish you good evening.’

Israel, who had turned away, did not answer this salutation, or perhaps know he had actually gone, for when he again turned he looked surprised, and moved as if to go after him, but stopped.

What could be the meaning of those boding cries from so many different quarters? He was a fool to ask. What did they mean? Why, nothing! He would go to bed, and spend his time more usefully in sleep than in thinking of them.

He did go to his bedroom, undressed, and lay down, but vainly strove to sleep.

A climbing plant, the Virginia Creeper, whose

red leaves shed a kind of glory over the front of the house, at this period, was outside his window. It had got loose with the high wind that had been recently growing up, and every now and then lashed with such sudden and inexplicable violence against the window, as if it were directed by some voiceless monster who wished to give an alarm, but could find no other way of doing so than this.

Israel's heart burned within him, to find himself for the first time in his life moved by influences which he had ever held, and still held, in the most boundless contempt.

But for all that he could not sleep, nor put aside the sense of misgiving of danger.

'Why not get up and go and see that all is right?' he suddenly reflected, and recovered at once his equanimity and strength at the thought of action.

The Overman, Lusty, who was, of course, in bed, lived not far off; so Israel went there, and called outside the cottage for him to come down.

'Anything the matter, master?' asked a voice that seemed muffled with the nightcap that almost

covered the head that was thrust out of a chamber window, in answer to the summons.

‘No, but I have thought of something that must be seen to. Come quickly!’

They were soon at the mine. The engines were hard at work, not in bringing up coal, but in pumping up water. The coal in the fire grate close by was burning brightly; the night-deputy busy in the office.

Israel and the Overman went down in the cage, and at the bottom found the stableman looking after the horses. The man reported all well.

Farther on—in the principal level—they found repairers at work, replacing such portions of the rotten props as could not be got at in the daytime without disturbing the colliers. In fact, the night shift had been put off by the Overman on the present occasion to allow of these repairs, as he explained more than once to Israel; who seemed, he thought, displeased to find the night shift of colliers not at work as usual. The repairers also reported all well.

Presently they turned out of the central level into one much narrower and lower roofed, where

they were soon stopped by a door, placed there to prevent the artificial air current passing along the level except when the work of the mine might require its ventilation.

They passed through that door, and closed it after them, and advanced towards another door, and were about to open it, when, to the surprise of Israel and the horror of Lusty, it opened, as if with volition of its own, away from them; while the air thus admitted came in a strong current towards them.

Lusty, who was as superstitious as he was irreligious, stood as one paralysed, and for some time could scarcely understand, much less answer Israel's question,

‘Who can be there? Some one is!’

Seeing the Overman's credulity and utter helplessness, Israel thought it prudent to offer a brief explanation. ‘It is a cross current of air of some kind—a pure accident. Let us go on.’

‘Not for ahl you could give me, Mr. Mort. Not if you'd say the mine should be ahl my own to-morrow.’

‘Stay here, then—coward that you are!—till I come back.’

Israel went forward, holding his lamp so that he might keep a good look out for any skulking figure, but returned after some minutes, looking angry, puzzled, but also deeper than ever in gloom.

Something ran past their feet into a stall, separated from the level by a canvas screen. The Overman understood that incident: it was a rat; he sprang after it, lifted the curtain, and disappeared.

Israel had little time for further reflection on the sense or absurdity of his Overman’s pursuit of the rat. Whether Lusty had opened his lamp to see better where the animal had gone to, or whether he had fallen and broken the glass of the lamp, was never to be known; but scarcely had he been gone more than half a minute, when Israel heard a fearful explosion—and simultaneously a very river of fire burst from the stall across his eyes, and then death and darkness seemed to enter on the unchallenged possession of the mine.

CHAPTER VII.

AT LAST.

AMONG the destructive phenomena of Nature, few are more awful than those attending the explosion of fire-damp in a mine.—The sudden raising of the temperature, the blinding flame, the flash as of the most brilliant lightning, the sound as of the most tremendous clap of thunder; then the rush through all the levels of the roaring whirlwind of flaming atmosphere, breaking down, overturning, or destroying whatever it chances to meet—doors, trams, men, horses—till it reaches the shaft, and, bursting up with all the power and fury of a volcano, belches forth iron cages, pump-timbers, brattice-work forming the casing of the shaft, stone, coal, etc., while lifting from their very foundations the staging, engine-beams, machinery, and other erections at the mouth of the pit.

It seems at such times as if Nature were no lifeless congeries of underground earth, and rock, and water, and coal, and gas, such as we habitually think of, when the word is used in connection with a mine ; but a vital, sentient power ; that, patient at ordinary times, feels herself outraged beyond endurance at last, and summons all her subsidiary forces to her aid, to sweep her enemies out of her path.

Within the mine, men are thrown down without even the warning of a single second of time ; are stricken blind, sometimes permanently ; their clothes may take fire, while the wearers are scorched sometimes to a cinder.

The temperature after an explosion is occasionally raised so high as to convert the coal at the sides of the levels into coke.

The air doors, for checking and guiding the wind, being destroyed, the ventilation is reversed ; and so the stalls where the colliers may still be at work in safety get filled with steam and carbonic acid, which overpowers them too ; while retreat or movement of any kind becomes difficult, frequently impossible.

Whatever life, indeed, may still exist in the mine has to contend with an enemy as deadly as the fire-damp, and far more insidious—that is, the carbonic acid gas, just mentioned, known as the choke-damp or after-damp; which has no explosive tendencies, but simply suffocates whatever has breathing life. It has neither taste nor smell; it is at first breathed unconsciously, and so steals away the faculties that men often die before they can know they are assailed.¹

Within a few minutes after the explosion, people began hurriedly to gather about the pit's mouth, narrating to each other—some, what sounds they had heard from their several homes, and others, what they had seen; and explaining how fearful had been the vomiting of the shaft, where the whole moveable contents of the pit, including the casing of the shaft, seemed to have been lifted from the bottom with awful force, and shot forth into space. But as every one said, and with a

¹ The facts in the above summary are mostly taken from Simonin's 'Underground Life': a book to which the author has also to acknowledge himself otherwise indebted.

half-feeling of congratulation, there was less life endangered—through the time, night—than might have been expected. Had it been in the day, two or three hundred lives must have been sacrificed, whereas on the present occasion, there was not even the night-shift; so that in all, not more than a dozen men, besides the stableman, with perhaps his boy helper, would have been below. These unfortunates had doubtless perished. As yet no one knew or suspected that Israel himself, their employer, and the Overman were both below in the mine.

The state of things was indeed remarkable at the pit-mouth. Ponderous iron shears had been snapped and torn asunder like so much match-wood. Immense bolts and stanchions of iron had been twisted into the most fantastic shapes, contorted as if with extreme agony. A tall chimney standing near exhibited a gap in the brick-work, extending from the base far up. The atmosphere was still filled with clouds of coal-dust and sulphur, which the bystander inhaled with every breath. Heavy detached masses of metal and masonry lay scattered about, even to the distance of more than

a hundred yards. Crowds were seen in every direction, for miles round—east, west, north, and south ; dense throngs of men, women, and children coming and meeting at the pit-mouth. There they formed into innumerable little groups round those unfortunates whose relatives were below. Wives were crying for husbands, mothers and fathers for sons, youths for their brothers and fathers.

In strange contrast with this spectacle was that presented at one point of the outskirts of the multitude ; where a score or two of boys, thinking nothing of the calamity so near, knowing, perhaps, none of their friends were in danger, feeling only the sense of youthful and abounding life, were pursuing, with surprising skill, the game of sliding down a steep incline, one after another in rapid and unbroken succession, seated on an iron slab, and balanced on a single iron rail—the ring of the metals, and the joyous accompanying laugh, penetrating far in among the crowd, and adding a new pang to the sorrowing hearts that heard and understood.

Clergymen of the Church of England, Baptist,

Wesleyan, and other ministers, now began to arrive, and to exert themselves in comforting the mourners ; while one, standing up in the vehicle that had brought him, began to pray aloud, and afterwards to address them, and to sing with them a hymn of consolation.

Among those who heard the roar of the explosion was Israel's old housekeeper, who alone knew or believed he was in the pit. Superstition lent wings to her aged feet. She came hobbling along towards the mine, convinced that now her warnings were to be realised.

A great dread and horror fell on all when they heard from her the truth.

But no one offered to go down, even if a descent were practicable, through a shaft that was in an utterly ruinous condition.

Israel's night-deputy, it will be remembered, had been absent on duty in the office aboveground. * He came, and, after a careful examination, said it was impossible that any one could get down, and that if they could it would only be to go to certain death, for there were so many old reser-

voirs of gas in the mine, that more explosions would be sure to take place.

Even while he spoke, another explosion sent the crowd scattering in all directions, lest the flying *débris* might kill or maim them.

Suddenly there appeared among them Rees Thomas and his wife, who looked pale and delicate, and whom he seemed to be vainly striving to persuade to go back.

‘Is it true,’ he demanded of a bystander, ‘that the master, Israel Mort, is below?’

‘Ay, and dead enough, I’ll be bound.’

‘We’ll see to that. Morgan’—he spoke to the night-deputy—‘will you, in the absence alike of the master, and the Overman, James Lusty, give me authority to act, if I say I believe there may be cause for hope, and that I am willing to sacrifice my life, if necessary, in the attempt to try?’ Then he added, in so low a tone that only the two could hear, ‘Depend on me not to harm you or your position.’

‘If you like to take the responsibility, you can; but you are warned. I’d do as much as most men for my employer, but——’

‘You are right. The task is more dangerous than even the collier’s known heroism would justify. I say that to clear you. But it does not seem exactly the same to me, as regards myself. I am called here ! You give me authority then ?’

‘Yes.’

Rees Thomas turned to his wife, took her in his arms, and kissed her as he said—

‘Wife, dearest, we have so lived that death is not necessarily a thing we need very much fear. This is God’s work—I am sure of it. If I can save him—Israel, the strong man—thou shalt see how he will reward us. And so farewell. If we never meet again, rear up our child in thine own spirit, and I can ask no more.’

She clung to him for a moment in silent, bitter, but not all bitter, anguish ; then put him from her, smiled, put her hand on her breast, and said to him—

‘I am comforted. Go.’

In a wonderfully short space of time they rigged up something to allow this Christian soldier, this one rank and file of the forlorn hope, to go down.

A rope was about his waist. He grazed his hands till they were raw and bleeding all over with the repeated collisions of his form against the sides in his descent, which his hands could alone prevent from being dangerous or fatal. But he felt not the smart; he only longed to go more and more swiftly down.

He reached the bottom in safety. He found the stableman lying dead among his horses, as if guarding them to the last.

There he is obliged to pause, on account of the warning given by the dying light of his lamp.

But the light improves little by little, and he is able to advance.

He passes along the central level, where all is terrible silence, and partial ruin. Every instant he expects to find his way barred by the fallen coal, and masonry, and earth.

He worms his way through holes, he squeezes his way between the roof and great heaps of *débris*, he calls—but gets no answer.

He tries one level, but finds it impassable on account of the gas.

He tries another, and advances in it, but with

a sort of instinctive feeling Israel is not there ; and at last, after vainly shouting, returns without exploring it to its end, and then fears he has done wrong.

He enters a third level—and a cry escapes him—he sees dark substances on the floor.

Commending his soul to God, for the atmosphere here is to the last degree oppressive and dangerous—life and death a question of perhaps of a few seconds less or more of delay, he stoops to examine them.

He touches one of these, and there is a groan. He stoops, moistens the lips of the senseless man with tea ; the man revives, and, half unconsciously, faintly appeals to him for help. He is one of the carpenters.

Rees Thomas grasps him, lifts him with a more than mortal strength, and moves away.

Suddenly his strength is shaken. He hears a far-off voice calling. It is Israel's, he is sure of it, he would give the world to be able to put this man down and go back, but he cannot ; no, before God he feels he must not !

A new danger affects him. His way is barred.

A Fall of earth has taken place, and shut them in as in a trap.

He stoops, and bending over the man he has been carrying, prays just for one minute to his Maker, in language and thought such as only these moments can inspire : then rises with new hope and fortitude.

How wonderfully now he is served by his old knowledge of the mine ! He remembers another route by which to pass from this level to the bottom of the shaft.

It is a great comfort to him to find the mine as free from gas as it is. The repeated explosions, driving the air to the shaft, and so up to the surface, had been naturally followed by a great downward flow of pure air to fill the vacancy ; carrying back with it into the innermost recesses the deadly choke damp, and leaving the approaches comparatively free.

Again he lifts his burden, and moves on. He passes, as he expected he should, Israel ; and he hears the latter in a faint, hoarse voice cry for assistance, though what it says he cannot discover ; nor stop to investigate.

But the lamp-light shows his face ; Israel knows him, and the sight seemed to bring back into him new life.

‘ Ha ! Rees Thomas ! ’

‘ Israel, I will come back ; ’ such were the words on Rees Thomas’s lips, but the burden he bore was suddenly obliged to be shifted to pass under some new obstacle, and he had the inexpressible anguish to feel that Israel had not heard, and might die in the belief of his neglect of him.

After superhuman efforts he reached the bottom of the shaft, where the air helped to revive the saved man ; and then, without a moment’s delay, other than sufficed to drink a few drops from his precious can of tea, Rees Thomas sped as swiftly back as the fearful nature of the way permitted.

A dreadful question tormented this tender-conscienced man as he went. If another victim interposed for help before Israel, ought he, or not, to save him first ? He could not answer it quite to his own satisfaction ; but he determined he would take the responsibility before God and man of saving only Israel, if one more only was to be saved through his means.

He found, when he got to the place where Israel lay, three other bodies near him. It was a dreadful business, the groping about to see their faces, and try to recognise them, as he was obliged to do, for he could not for the moment tell which was the man he sought.

Lusty, the Overman, was one of the three. He had crawled back to the place where he left Israel, and there died.

Another of the three was a repairer. He also was dead.

The third was the man he sought.

Israel had turned on his face and fainted, when his last hope expired with the departure of the Deputy.

But there he was, and, to Rees Thomas's boundless relief, still living. He felt the heart beat, he felt the slow but still warm breath on his own cheek, when he knelt.

‘Israel! Israel Mort! Be of good cheer. A friend is with thee, who will not again leave thee. A friend! Dost thou hear?’

‘A friend!’ Very faint was the utterance of the words, and dubious in their expression.

‘Ay, one whom thou hast yet to know—the Friend of all mankind. He it is who sends me here. Drink! Drink!’

Israel’s burnt and feverish lips clung unconsciously to the can, as the lips of a famished babe will cling to its mother’s breast, when nourishment comes at last.

‘Better? You are better?’

‘Ay.’ Then with strange wonder in his eyes he gasped out, ‘Rees Thomas? Thee!’

‘Ay, God be praised! But be silent now. Concentrate all thy latent powers of life within. Have faith. Now then!’

He took Israel across his lap, looking down upon him for one moment as he did so with a look of love, devotion, and heroic purpose, that Israel was too ill to catch more than the faintest reflection of; but even that sufficed to confound him utterly. He closed his eyes with the words,

‘God help me! What manner of man is this?’

Then Rees Thomas found he was once more bearing along a senseless burden, knowing not whether to life or to death.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CHARACTER IN REVOLUTION.

CAN character be changed suddenly :—in a space of time so brief, that a man can say, ‘ Thus I was up to a certain time—thus I am since that time passed over me ? ’

Or, in other words, what is this but to ask—Can the current of a man’s daily and worldly life, fed as it is from innumerable sources of his past career—of his individual desires and aims—of his peculiar experiences, temptations, errors, truths, ignorances, knowledge—of his fierce battles against his fellows, while sympathising with them in their traditional belief in the necessity of maintaining all those things that injure or destroy other and nobler kinds of sympathy ;—can all these powers and influences be at once not largely

modified only, but absolutely changed in their essential nature ; reversed ; just as if a strongly flowing river, with its tributaries, were to turn, as by its own volition, and go back the way it came, in search of some newer and nobler channel through which alone it would henceforward pass ?

Could such a question have been put to Israel Mort a few minutes before his eventful midnight visit with his assistant to the mine, he would probably have wondered for a brief space at the strangeness of it—have asked himself whether any influences could so change him—have smiled at the absurdity, and then forgotten it.

And yet even now, as Rees Thomas bears him along in arms that tremble with their too great burden, yet cling to it as if with the instinct of the possession of some new and most invaluable treasure—something which, if only it can be saved and borne to the upper world, and to the freshness and glory of day, shall make the Deputy's own life more precious in his own eyes—while Israel is thus being borne back towards the shaft, from which faint glimmerings of light now begin to

reach them, and illumine their way, his whole being is in a state of revolution, however little conscious he may be of the fact.

The inevitable slowness of the Deputy's movements causes much time to pass, which in itself tends to Israel's recovery.

He has frequently to be put down and taken up again, in order to pass over, under, or circuitously by the difficulties of the way.

On one of these occasions, Rees Thomas has felt uncertain as to his route, and gone away a few steps to explore closer.

Returning, he found, to his astonishment, Israel sitting up with his back against a mass of fallen rock.

The Deputy held his lamp to Israel's face ; and the illumination cast there by the dim light was as nothing to the inner radiance that almost transfigured the fire-scarred, storm-beaten face of the Deputy as he met Israel's faint smile, and listened to the half-inarticulate words, slowly and laboriously uttered—

‘ I thought you had left me to my fate.’

‘ I shall never leave you till I have placed you

in His hands whose servant I am, and whose service will yet be yours. Come !’

Israel gazed on the Deputy’s features with all the wonder and earnestness that were possible to him under his physical state—gazed as if this were a problem he must master at any cost, and yet could not; then shut his eyes, strove to rise, but was unable to lift his weight; then again knew no more till a few minutes later he found himself near the sump, or water-pit, looking up through the shaft wistfully to the faint light at the top.

Glancing round for the Deputy, he saw him coming toward him with a pitcher of water. Israel drank from it, drank again and again, and was wonderfully refreshed; and would have gone on drinking while a drop remained in the vessel, but the Deputy took it from him with gentle force, and dashed the remainder in his face.

Israel gasped for a moment between his anger and the shock, but presently found himself so much strengthened, that he was able, with the Deputy’s assistance, to stand upright; though he trembled like one who leaves his bed for the first

time after weeks of an exhausting and dangerous illness, and he knew he should utterly collapse and fall if Rees Thomas' arms were but for a moment withdrawn.

‘Could you, do you think, sit astride the bar I had rigged up to descend with, you being on one side the rope, and I the other?’

‘Yes,’ feebly responded Israel, ‘if——’

‘I know; if I hold you. Of course I shall hold you.’

Then he led him toward where the rope hung, and which was quivering with the latest of the many anxious signals of enquiry passed from above; and after a minute or two Israel was not only safely seated on the crossbar, and his hands clenching the rope, but had a rope so securely lashed round his waist and shoulders, that even if he again became insensible, he might be borne safely up to the surface.

The Deputy now took his own seat, blew a shrill piercing note on the whistle that hung round Israel's neck, shook the rope above their heads as well as he could while he and Israel lessened the tension by supporting themselves a moment on

their feet, and after a brief and agitating pause, they found themselves swiftly moving upwards.

Too swiftly! for the rope swayed to and fro with its burden, till the men struck violently against first one side, then the other.

The Deputy, however, soon recovered his presence of mind; and with a strong stick managed speedily to keep them both tolerably safe, by keeping them from touching the walls.

‘Take care!’ suddenly cried Israel, in a voice that seemed almost like his own strong one come back. ‘Take care! There are pieces of iron and lumps of earth falling down the shaft!’

The swaying of the rope and the injured state of the shaft were indeed making their upward course exceedingly perilous. Again rose, and stronger than before, Israel’s warning cry,

‘Take care!’ Alas! it came too late; a heavy piece of iron was loosened by the rope near the top of the shaft, it struck against the side, rebounded a little towards the centre, and so fell, till it struck the Deputy on the head at the moment he was just touching with his outstretched stick the wall of the shaft.

The stick fell from his grasp, the head dropped, the hand that held by the rope relaxed ; a moment more and he would have fallen from the dreadful perch, but that Israel clasped him suddenly in his arms ; and held to him in spite of the dizziness and blows and injuries that the renewed oscillation caused ; and against which there was now no help but patient endurance, and hope that the top might yet be reached alive ; held to him, even while he was himself almost unconscious of anything but the dull confused sense of one painful shock after another ; and so they reached the surface.

Strong hands, anxious faces, and earnest hearts were there ready to receive them, while others kept off the swaying, agitated, turbulent crowd of people, from which rose every instant some anguished dreadful question that no one could answer, from those who vainly strove to get to the pit mouth, so that they might know at the earliest moment one way or another the fate of the missing ones.

The group at that moment nearest the shaft was an impressive one. The Deputy was lying on the

ground within a dark circle of forms, on which fell the first faint rays of a cold daybreak. Israel was on his knees supporting him ; and with eyes that seemed to flash and burn in the wonderful intensity of their fixed, despairing, defiant, yet tender and anguished gaze.

Could God live and let this man die? seemed the question of one moment. And then the next, Would He not spare him, even for His own gain, to be still so served? And yet again, Was he, Israel, so utterly helpless, and worthless alike to God and man, that he could offer nothing, do nothing to keep the life in there that was so swiftly hurrying away?

The Deputy's eyes had been for some time closed, but now they opened a little, while his lips oozed with foam ; but as he slowly recognised Israel, a smile, such as only his Divine Master, Christ, could have inspired, broke over it, and his lips moved, though to Israel's distress no sound came with the effort.

‘Try again,’ he said, with a touching effort to modulate the returning harshness of his own voice, ‘while I listen.’

He bent down, and succeeded in hearing a few words.

‘Israel—my—my—wife—and—’

‘They are mine if you die. I swear it;’ interrupted Israel, perfectly conscious of all he was saying; yet doing it as if it were the most natural thing in the world for him or anybody else to do; and only unconscious of—thinking, caring nothing about—the sudden revolution of his whole being consummated in this solemn undertaking.

‘Did I not say?—’ burst out the Deputy with a flash of enthusiasm that overmastered for a moment the deadly faintness that possessed his whole frame—

He paused, breathless; his face again clouding, his eyes half closed.

‘What?’ asked Israel.

‘That you are mine—bought with my blood, and now belong to Him who bought me and all of us. Living or dying, I claim you for Him!’

His head dropped on his breast. Israel felt his weight increase, and gently lowered him nearer, nearer still, to that mother-earth, which seemed again to yearn for her child, till at last

he lay prostrate ; Israel bending over him rigid as a statue of stone, and with an expression on his face that seemed to be as stern and immovable as if his lineaments were indeed carved on the stone.

A low whisper of ‘He is dead!’ was now heard from among the bystanders ; and it was taken up and repeated, again, again, and again, till the crowd that had become suddenly silent, as aware of the tragedy within which they could not get close enough to see, became agitated with comment, discussion, and increasing but vague alarms as to the extent and consequences of the night’s calamity.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

FOR two days the only question in Dr. Jolliffe's mind was not whether either of the two men would live, but which would die first.

But on the third day, the doctor found, on making his usual rounds, two couches, placed opposite and near each other in Israel's sitting-room; and that these were occupied—the one by Israel, the other by the Deputy.

Though a certain something noticeably subdued in demeanour had begun to appear in Israel while the men were handling him and the Deputy immediately after the accident; and when their lightest touch could not but enhance the almost intolerable physical anguish he endured from burns, bruises, and shattered nerves; he had burst out in anger when, forgetting his orders

to take the Deputy, whom he refused to believe dead, to his (Israel's) own house, they moved away with the senseless frame in quite a different direction, the one leading to the Deputy's own house.

And Israel was right. Nature and the doctor together brought back Rees Thomas' wandering forces of life—wandering as if to seek a final exit. He had been stunned, not killed—though a new danger threatened, even more serious still, insanity.

Israel quickly recovered. The splendid natural stamina of the man helped him through. He was burnt in many parts; but happily had defended his face with his hands, when he saw, or almost felt before he saw, the river of fire passing over him; and the hands, though very painful and inflamed, were much protected by the black gloves that Israel happened to wear.

He had worn these gloves for the first time at the death of his children; a second time at the death of his wife; and then, frugal as ever, he put them by, till he chose to remember, as if determinedly ignoring David, he had no more deaths to look for, except his own, and as

he could hardly wear them at *that* funeral, he had better wear them now. And so he began to put them on now and then, though he was almost more comfortable without than with them ; except when, as on the night of his going forth chilly from his warm bed into the air, he needed them.

Israel, as he lay on the couch and thought of many things, often thought of and looked at his hands, as if wondering what life would be to one so busy and restless, were he to lose them, or have them rendered useless.

‘No bones were broken,’ he told the doctor before waiting for the doctor to tell him ; and as to bruises, why, that was the doctor’s business ; and so Israel dismissed at once all further personal care about the many surface injuries he had received ; and about the pain which was, as the doctor knew well, extremely great, especially when the times for dressing the wounds came round.

As to Rees Thomas,—once, when the doctor came in, obeying the signal Israel gave, he went to the Deputy, felt his pulse, raised the lids of his eyes, and spoke to him, but without receiving any kind of answer, or sign that he had been heard.

Taking a phial from his pocket, he poured out the contents into a wine-glass, and asked the Deputy to drink.

Still receiving no reply, he touched his lips with his fingers, after dipping them in the mixture, and then put the glass to them. Mechanically they opened, and little by little the doctor managed to get the whole swallowed.

After another prolonged and earnest look, the doctor crossed to Israel, and said in a low voice :

‘He will sleep now, and when he wakes—if he ever wakes—he will be either a confirmed madman or on the way to a rapid and decisive cure. I am hopeful. If, as I am inclined to believe, he has just passed safely through the one critical moment when Nature makes her last effort for salvation, the present state is only the natural reaction from so violent a struggle, the intense and inevitable yearning for rest, which must be had, no matter at what cost. If it does not mean that, it means, as I have said, death or insanity.’

‘Then he will require to be kept quiet for many days?’ said Israel, after a prolonged and gloomy fit of silence.

‘Certainly,’ responded the doctor.

‘All right. Then I must be up and stirring.’

‘Not to-day,’ said the doctor, with quick decision.

‘Why not?’ sharply demanded Israel.

‘Because you will almost certainly have a relapse if you do, and because I bring you news that will convince you there is no occasion. Already, and without waiting for your letter, they have sent you from the Penman Coed colliery one of their most experienced viewers to lead a detachment of six-and-twenty picked men, and they are now about to venture down and examine into the actual state of things, and do whatever seems most necessary on the spur of the moment.’

‘Thanks! thanks!’ ejaculated Israel slowly, and, as the doctor thought, almost grudgingly. Perhaps he felt all the misgivings natural to a man who has been long concealing from the world a perilous secret, and sees the moment arrive when others must get upon the track, and may suddenly expose him to the shame and scorn of his fellows, perhaps drive him from society to seek thenceforward the haunts known only to despair.

If he could but have been there with the explorers to go through the mine with them! To say the right word, suggest the right thought at the precise moment that might make both so valuable! To lure them in this direction, or to check them in that!

‘Well now, Mr. Mort,’ said the doctor, as he took up his hat to go, ‘promise me to be quiet three days, and I promise you not only to let you off after that, but to do all I can in the meantime to fortify you against what you must expect to see and hear—when you again venture to the mine.’

‘Ay—that’s it! What I must see and hear! And do you think, doctor, I have done anything else but see and hear since I came back to this place in this company? The groans of the dying—the faces of the dead—the reproachful cries of the women and children—this is the sort of devil’s music and devil’s show to which I have been listening and on which I have been gazing ever since. And the sleeping your drugs give me—or what you call sleeping—is worse than any waking. I can by sheer force—doctor, stare at me if you

like;—but I can, I say, by sheer force, while I have got all my faculties about me—fight, and fight hard, with all this hideous phantasmagoria, and put down a deal of it; and what I can't, I can bear—as a man should. But in sleep all sorts of ghastly, creeping, nameless, monstrous creatures—things hatched in the mine, but things I never saw, nor ever expect to see, there—seem to know that I am made suddenly helpless, that I have no arm of will to strike at them—that I am ripe for suffering, impotent to resist—and the knowledge seems to put a new spirit into them, a kind of jovial madness over their prey—so that——'

He paused, wiped his brow, seemed to shun the doctor's glance, then said with a great and most painful change of voice, as if he had but newly discovered that his crown of strength—a crown, even if one of iron—was being taken from him, and that thenceforward all things were possible, no matter to what extent of degradation they might carry him,

'What was I talking about, doctor? But there! it doesn't matter.'

The doctor was much embarrassed, but thought

it best to be silent, and let Israel continue as he pleased.

But Israel knew—no man better—the value of silence, and so offered neither explanation nor apology for his recent excitement.

The doctor again took up his hat, which he had put down, and then grasped with his usual cordial grasp, as though nothing particular had happened, the hand of Israel; which was so damp and altogether unsatisfactory to the doctor that he held it, unresistingly, and looked into Israel's eyes, which were wild and rolling. The touch and look, both full of sympathy, affected Israel as he had never been affected before by such mute agencies. He pressed the doctor's hand, and grew calm.

After a little pause, he again broke the silence, and said with a something on his face that looked more like a true smile than the doctor had ever seen on it before :—

‘I meant to have got rid of all this sad stuff before you came—I meant him yonder to have had the benefit, not you.’

The doctor laughed, and then they chatted a while on ordinary subjects, though Israel seemed

as if wanting yet to say something, and at last it came out:

‘It is but a cowardly way—to shut your eyes when you see dangers ahead. I’ve been trying to manage it, but can’t. So, doctor, be prepared. I fear very much this explosion, which luckily has not yet cost us much in life, whatever else it may cost’ (and there the doctor knew by the pause that a heavy sigh had escaped Israel, but that he had smothered the sound of it), ‘will be followed by other explosions. I ought to be there, you see. I ought to warn the party of explorers. I must do it—I will—ay, and at once!’

He stood up, and looked for the moment as if he could go forth and fulfil whatever duty or self-interest might demand.

‘They are down in the mine by this time, and they are certainly taking all possible precautions;’ said the doctor, standing directly before Israel, his attitude and breadth of form seeming to say, ‘I’ll argue with you if that’ll do; but if not, then you shall have what you’re so fond of—force.’

‘They are down, are they?’ echoed Israel in a tone which might be either resignation or discon-

tent, so curiously did it seem to hover between both. He sat down, and so far satisfied the doctor.

Another day passed, and with great improvement for Israel. The Deputy also seemed better ; for although he scarcely moved, there was something in the eye when it opened, and looked round, that suggested to Israel consciousness and sanity were slowly but surely coming back.

Israel's first display of growing recovery was the demand on his old housekeeper to bring him a table, also paper, pens and ink, all of which he immediately made use of in writing a little note, and folding it up, but which he did not address, as the Deputy reclining opposite him, and watching Israel, seemed to notice ; though whether understandingly the latter could not say, as the Deputy had not yet spoken a single word, or given a single clear sign of mental recovery.

Rees Thomas also seemed to notice that on the doctor's next visit to them Israel put this note into the doctor's hands as if it were a matter of course and of little importance.

Perhaps the doctor saw the Deputy's look of

enquiry ; for, after reading it, and dressing Israel's wounds, when he crossed to the former—being then between the two men—he smiled significantly, and held out the note in front of his breast for the Deputy to take without attracting Israel's attention. When the doctor had gone, and Israel had dropped off into a fitful slumber, the Deputy, reviving a little in strength, read what had been written :—

‘Look after him. If I and the mine are to be ever worth a pin, he must be saved, set up, made strong. Get extra advice if you think it necessary. Whatever must be paid shall be. Take my word for that.

‘ I. M.’

Was it the mine Israel cared for? Was it the business-help Israel felt he more than ever needed, and that the Deputy could so well render? Or was there something below the obvious and apparently selfish meaning—that Israel felt, but did not choose to avow, or even be suspected of?

What the doctor thought the doctor never said, so nothing could be got from him.

But what the Deputy thought may be guessed from the nervous clutch towards his Bible that lay near,—the sudden cessation of his reading, and the backward stretch of his head upon his pillow, so that he might gaze upward unseen, and breathe out the prayer his soul was just for one moment strong enough to feel, but that his voice was too weak yet to give utterance to. Then his mental powers relapsed once more into vacuity.

CHAPTER X.

AN INCIDENT OF THE EXPLOSION.

It was a great surprise to Israel, that, during these days of illness at home, he had neither seen nor heard of Rees Thomas's wife.

It was quite certain that the news of the injuries they had received from the accident and their removal together to Israel's house had reached the Deputy's mother-in-law ; for she had been met coming towards the mine in a state of fearful agitation by the messengers Israel had sent expressly to inform her ; so that she might, if she could, soften or delay the intelligence to her daughter.

Beyond that he knew nothing. And he dreaded to ask the doctor if he knew anything of the two women, lest he might hear of fresh calamity, and so directly or indirectly be tempted to tell the Deputy, and increase his danger.

The Deputy was buried in deep sleep when the doctor came on his next visit. While he and Israel discoursed together they were simultaneously attracted by a voice singing outside the house. It was the voice of a woman—thrilling, strange, and sweet.

It was a verse from a hymn that she sang, and Israel did not at first catch or recognise the words.

But she had no sooner finished the verse than, instead of going on with the hymn, she repeated the same lines, and then Israel understood them distinctly enough.

On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,
And cast a wistful eye
To Canaan's fair and happy land,
Where my possessions lie.

Israel's eye caught the doctor's enquiringly, who said,

‘Do you know where she got that?’

‘No.’

‘Yesterday, this poor woman, who has been continually haunting the pit mouth since the accident, and who, I am sorry to say, is insane,

with the shock of hearing that her husband was dead——’

‘Who is he?’ asked Israel, abruptly.

‘Let me see; what is his name?’ mused the doctor, as if trying to recollect. ‘But, no matter, just now. I will tell you the story just as it has been told to me.’ And this was in substance what the doctor related:—

The woman they had just heard singing outside had with her husband heard the explosion. They had immediately hurried to the pit mouth.

There they separated; she encouraging him in his purpose to go below and try to succour the unfortunates who might be lying there; pleading to God and man for help. But he had not long gone from her before she harrowed the hearts of all near by calling to her husband down the shaft, in accents of the most piercing anguish,

‘Husband! Dearest! Canst thou hear? It is I! Thy wife! Speak to me, or I shall die! Speak, or I must come to thee; ay, if I leap down!’

Between every phrase of invocation she stopped, leaned her head down, her ear striving to catch

the faintest response, and, obtaining none, she would begin again.

More and more passionate and wild became the cries, and the people around her took counsel one with another, as to whether she was not losing her senses, and whether she might not do, as she said, rejoin her husband by plunging madly into the abyss.

They spoke to her soothingly, and tried to draw her away homeward, by the promise they would soon go down, and see if they could find and bring him to her, but she paid no heed to their words.

So, carefully approaching her as she leaned most dangerously over the pit edge, a man caught her in his arms and had forcibly to remove her.

But her cry of anguish—her outpouring of tears—of passionate appeals for mercy, and to be let alone, and at last her burst of hysteric laughter, so appalled the man that he set her down on her promising with all the simplicity of a wayward child that she would let him hold her hand fast.

Again she called to her husband, but with a

strangely low, fervent, penetrating tone, as if it was no longer corporeal frame calling to corporeal frame, but the spirit within to the spirit within.

‘Hush!’ she said with uplifted finger, and a most moving smile playing over her pale face, ‘I shall hear him presently. He has far to come!’

So real seemed her conviction that it moved those around her to wait in half-expectation. Again she spoke to them as if they were to be also comforted by the news—

‘He is coming! I hear his light footfall. Listen! There! You heard him then surely?’

A great hush fell upon all who were near. No one could say that her husband might not be living—might not have heard his wife’s cry—might not at that very moment be about to re-appear at the shaft bottom.

The suspense of the crowd became so great, that at last the man who held her—a collier of powerful voice—and who knew by experience how to make it go to the farthest possible distance, shouted down the pit.

Something was heard in reply, but the man

knew the sound well, and said, 'It's only the echo.'

But the woman passionately denied this. Again she called in that low, sweet, fervent, trustful voice—leaned her ear for the response, and then turned her flushing face towards the man who still grasped her hand, half stooping as she was, with such a bright and glad look mingling with the glance of the mad woman, that he was at once fascinated and appalled, as she whispered to him:—

'He's there! He hears me! Hark! He's too happy to speak to me, so he sings, as they say the angels do.'

'And what does he say?' asked the man.

'I can't tell, not yet. Do you listen too. I am so frightened often at the thought of him—so good, so fit only to live in heaven—that perhaps now he is angry I didn't have more faith that he was alive and would never be taken from me. Come, stoop down and listen. Oh, do ask him what he says, I entreat you!'

The man stooped, more to please and quiet her than from any expectation to hear the voice of

her lost husband ; then shook his head, and said again to her,

‘ If you heard anything, it was only the echo of your own call.’

This so excited her that she burst into transports of grief and anger, and in answer to her passionate appeals they all shouted. She again listened, and brought others to listen, and at last, to their astonishment, there was borne up towards them the sound of a man’s feeble voice.

By slow degrees they managed to discover that he had by a variety of means contrived to raise himself to a considerable height in the shaft through the débris that, to a certain extent, blocked it.

They lowered to him a can with some drink, and then, when they again heard him, he was singing a verse from a well-known hymn :—

On Jordan’s stormy banks I stand,
And cast a wistful eye
To Canaan’s fair and happy land,
Where my possessions lie.

By this time a basket had been got ready. This was lowered, and in a few minutes the collier thus

wonderfully rescued emerged to the surface, and the first sight of him was enough for the poor woman who waited and watched in the most absolute faith it was her husband. A maniacal cry rang through the air, and then some of the pitying women led her home.

This was the story told to Israel—who again listened for the woman's singing. He managed with the doctor's help to get to the window. He could not yet see her, but he heard her, and it seemed she was approaching. The voice was strangely sweet and pure. It was silent again for a moment or two, then rang out more clear and piercing than ever. The air, the words, the voice, seemed to make together something that was more like the soul-burden of some prodigal angel returning to the great Father of all, than the mere voice of wandering humanity, seeking to regain its home:—

On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,
And cast a wistful eye
To Canaan's fair and happy land,
Where my possessions lie.

The singer now emerged from the lane by

which she was approaching Israel, and he saw, just as he had been for some minutes expecting he should see, and to his profound grief, the mad wife of his friend and deliverer, Margaret Thomas.

The doctor and he exchanged significant glances. Margaret did not, however, look miserable. Faith seemed to have lived in her, while all other intellectual qualities had for the moment died, and to have filled her with a kind of joyous light.

Israel was in no mood to try to speak to her just then, but he watched her as she passed along, till the last sweep of her garments in the wind as she turned a corner sent him back to his couch, to ask himself whether he was in any way responsible for this new and yet unknown misery for his benefactor.

CHAPTER XI.

AT THE CRAIG LEVEL.

THE second day after the explosion, while Nest still felt the sudden terror inspired by it, and by the knowledge of the danger experienced by David's father, she had a new and trying chapter of life opened to her, which enhanced a thousandfold all the terrors of the accident.

Her father, Griffith Williams, was well known to be a kind man, and, by everybody but Israel Mort, acknowledged to be a just man; but the explosion, instead of softening his animosity towards Israel, seemed to deepen it; so that he could not but exult in the proof thus afforded of the punishment that sooner or later always overtakes the wicked.

It was not—so he said—the sharp, costly, harassing litigation he had been subjected to by

Israel's freaks, still less was it the original insult attending the sale of the mine—no, it was none of these things that moved him now, as he repeatedly assured his ever sympathetic but not very clear-minded wife; but the villany of Israel's conduct in carrying on the mine all these years without making any one of the great remedial alterations that he had sworn to be necessary twelve years ago, when the money was to come out of his—Griffith Williams's—pocket.

The Squire was too hopelessly prejudiced to consider that Israel's default in that respect might be due to the failure to obtain the requisite capital.

But for this language, which Nest heard incessantly repeated, she would have obeyed the natural yearning of her heart, have gone to Israel's house, and begged permission to wait on him in his illness. How sweet that would have been to David, when he should know; and what a relief to her overcharged heart in the meantime!

On this particular day she had excused herself from the dinner table on the plea of headache. But that evil she might have borne: what she

could not bear was the constant exhibition of uncharitableness on the part of a father so dear to her, and whom she had always felt to be so worthy of honour, and against one whom she already recognised in her heart as a second parent.

For with the simple faith and hopeful imaginativeness of maidenhood, Nest saw in the distance David and his father fully reconciled; and that necessarily included for her all possible goodness on Israel's part—all possible happiness for both families when the ultimate union of both should be accomplished.

Thinking thus, she wandered out into the garden, and felt soothed by the songs of the birds, the murmur of the wild stream, and forgot for a brief space the mine and all the melancholy associations that it aroused.

As she mused, and raised and let fall with her foot a pretty tangle of flowers that had passed over the edge of a flower-bed raised upon some natural rocks, something glanced rapidly before her eyes and fell upon her lap.

It was a paper wrapped round a stone, which

had been thrown from outside the boundary wall.

She rose and glanced round; then, at the thought of David, and fear of her father's anger against him, if he should observe the incident, sat down again to unwind and read the paper:—

‘I am here, and want urgently to see you. Can you accept from me the full sense of this necessity, and come to the Craig level without a moment's delay?’

‘Craig level’ was the name given to one of the wildest spots of the mountain, on account of the entrance there into an old and abandoned mine. It was one of those pits which lie so high within the mountain slopes that a ‘level’ gallery cut into one of them suffices for the winning of coal without a shaft.

Close by was a vast cinder-heap, that seemed as if it had bodily squatted down in a homogeneous mass upon and right across the lovely wild stream, which was therefore obliged to make way as well as it could round the black mound.

Nothing could be more complete than the

contrast between the hideous pile of man's making and the exquisite scenery around, including the wild stream, the high, waving, graceful bushes, and slender silvery birch trees along its banks, the undulations of the green surface as it stretched away upwards to the mountain peak, the lowly wild flowers, and the yellow gorse still in full bloom.

The wild stream itself, as if utterly unconscious of the outrage it suffered from, encircled the cinder heap as lovingly as if it were one of the fairest objects in creation; and became to it as a necklace, where shade and brightness alternated in rapid succession with the play of light on the moving water, like so many links in a diamond chain.

There David walked to and fro in a state of such absorbed, yet profound mental agitation, that at last he became conscious of his folly, and how it was unfitting him for the interview he had sought.

Making a strenuous effort at self-control, he endeavoured to stay the current that was carrying him away he hardly knew whither.

By the entrance into the mine was a little shed, which was just big enough for two people to sit, after painfully stooping to get in. He made his way in, and sat down.

Many and many a time had David sat there in boyhood waiting for some comrade, watching the while the bright little stream of water rushing out of the mine and pursuing its winding course through banks of flowering gorse.

Many a time, too, had he and another lad, tempted by repeated challenges from one to another, as to which would venture the farthest inside, gone in, and onward even to the distance of nearly a couple of miles: drawn along also by curiosity, and by the idea that existed among the youth of the neighbourhood, that valuable things might be found there.

David wondered as he looked back on these explorations. There had, then, been a time when he was less timid than he afterwards became. Did education make the change? The farther one saw, did one become the more incapable of using the insight obtained? He sighed profoundly as he owned to himself he could not tell.

He must go forth, to see if Nest were coming.

He did so, but his agitation seemed to increase, as he saw her garments fluttering in the wind afar off.

Thinking she might not have seen him, he went back to his seat, hoping to calm the increasing tremor of his nerves, and bitterly reproaching himself the while for his weakness.

There in the shed Nest found him, his fingers clammy with cold and perspiration, his face pale and distorted with passion, and covered with a kind of bead-like dew.

‘Come in,’ he said, before even he saw her.

Nest hesitated a moment, and looked as if doubting the propriety of his bidding, then went in, with a smile of sweet confidence, and was clasped in her lover’s arms.

‘Nest, dearest,’ he said after a pause, during which he seemed to be steadying his voice and manner, ‘thank you for this sweet confidence; believe me, it shall not be abused.

‘You know,’ he continued, ‘I went to London to report on the mine—and I may tell you now it was to report favourably. But first there was

delay. Men of business are mostly cautious, and fancy they often secure safety by virtue of being slow. My father was therefore left in suspense and I in misery, that I could not write to him.

‘At last, they declined. I then determined to go elsewhere, and see if I could not succeed better for him. I was fortunate ; a capitalist was ready. But last night the fearful news of the explosion reached us. The first feeling of my new agents was to have done with the mine at once, and forbid all further negotiations. But I induced them to listen, and to let me come down again to see what chances there yet remain for lending him a helping hand. Of course, he will have to make great sacrifices as to his own position, and perhaps even lose all right of property in it ; but I hope better things, and I am now going to see.’

‘And you will have to go down into the mine!’ ejaculated Nest, shrinking back in unutterable horror. ‘Go down to that fearful place?’

‘And if I were a soldier, and my commanding officer told me to march as one of a forlorn hope to storm a citadel, what would you have me do?’

David, as he said this, gazed into Nest's face as if his every hope of happiness here or hereafter were bound up in her reply.

Nest saw that look, and felt, as she supposed, all that was involved in it, so answered only with her tears for a minute or two; then she timidly crept to him, and pressed her heart against his breast, and murmured,

‘Yes, yes, you must go.’

‘Do you say so?’ David asked, as if in a kind of dreamy wonder.

‘Yes,’ sighed Nest, and placing her trembling hand in his.

She felt his trembling in reply; but it only deepened her sense of sympathy with him, for she thought his secret trouble meant sympathy with and for her.

Some instinct told David this, and made him shrink back from her, and presently cry out in words that seemed full of the most bitter anguish and self-reproach,

‘Nest, do not be deceived! you think me brave, heroic; that I am struggling simply to conceal

from you the suffering my fear for you inspires!
It is untrue, false! I am but a living lie!’

‘Oh, David, David, what mean you?’

‘That I am one of the rankest of cowards, even while pushed on by a cursed fate into the most cruel of positions, where I dare not show the most ordinary natural manifestation of what even strong men feel, lest I should break down at once and stand ashamed before a scornful and contemptuous world.’

‘Oh, David, David, dearest, this is not, cannot be true! Do you not see it cannot? Did you not lately go through all the most dangerous parts of the mine, sleep there, do your work so well that even my father has heard of you, and spoken words of admiration of the young fellow Israel had found to help him?’

‘Did he do that?’

‘Yes.’

‘Nest, you comfort me, even while I feel that the new alarm I have given you is itself a proof how ill things are with me here;’ and David put his hand to his breast.

‘David, I entreat you to listen to me. The pain you have to bear, I see and understand too well. And if I also must henceforth bear it, do you think so little of my love as to suppose I would evade it if I could? Oh, no! a thousand times no! For your sake, I do wish with all my heart and soul this thing were not so; but if you are thus marked out, selected from the herd of men for the accomplishment of this work, what can I think, feel, or say, but that just in proportion to the excess of pain and difficulty you individually find in it, is the value and glory of every conquest you achieve, and my pride and joy and exultation to stand by and wait and watch for the results?’

‘And you have no fear that—that the results may be——’

‘None, David, none.’

‘Nest,’ said David, after a long pause of passionate and wistful gazing into her eyes, ‘I will strive to tell you some other time all I have suffered in this way; for I feel that thus and thus alone, in communion with you, shall I entirely

master these unworthy emotions, if they ever are to be mastered.'

'Oh they will be—shall be!' exclaimed Nest, her face radiant with spiritual light and gladness that seemed to fill the dark little shed.

'And if so, you will be my deliverer in the future as you have already been in the past. Let us go forth.'

When David had helped Nest through the narrow and low aperture, he said to her, with quite a new serenity in his look,

'Pluck me a flower, Nest.'

She stooped, and did as she was bid, and he placed the flower carefully within his breast. Then he also stooped and plucked one to give to her, as he said :—

'When I meet you again—for my heart tells me we shall meet, that my prayers have already been answered—if I show you the flower you have now given me, this your precious gift, which now lies upon my heart, you will know it has not been dishonoured; but if I do not show it to you——'

‘What then?’ said Nest, softly and gravely.

‘Then demand it of me, that I may stand shamed before you and before God. Oh, Nest, pray for me, that I pass through the ordeal as I ought. Fortify me, strengthen me, my own darling! for I could not live to ask you to be my wife were my past gloomy fears of myself to be realised.’

It was Nest’s turn now to hesitate, to fear, to suggest doubt, as the thought occurred to her, she might never see him more.

‘David,’ she said, anxiously, ‘you will not needlessly rush into danger, for my sake you will not do that? Oh, David, I begin to wish you had not undertaken this work. If you doubt yourself, you do but after all what many of the noblest and bravest men would also do. The danger is not the kind of danger for spirits like yours to contend with. God shapes the man to the work. For rough labours, rough tools. Let others——’

‘Do *my* duty? No. Farewell! If with your love to think of as my recompense, an earthly father to be won, and a heavenly Father to watch

over me—and see how I try, in my humble human fashion, to repay Him for His unceasing bounty to me ;—if these things fail, it matters little what else may succeed. Nest, dearest, my own, one kiss, and then let me go.’

All Nest’s firmness, all her brightness, all her sweet confidence had died away, as David folded her in his arms, kissed her pale face and quivering lips passionately, many times, then seated her on the trunk of a tree, and not daring to trust himself with another word or look, hurried away.

CHAPTER XII.

A GREAT RELIEF.

IF the enthusiasm we feel in moments of intense spiritual elevation would but last, what a world might we not make of this? What lives might we not lead?

So asked Nest of herself, as she found hour by hour all the glow of her meeting with David die out, and leave only darkness behind.

As she lay restless on her bed that night, she troubled herself ceaselessly with two questions :—

Had she done right to let her lover go to dangers so great, and to which he was so unaccustomed? What if his own instinct, that warned him so strongly away from such undertakings, had been the true one, after all, by which he ought to have been guided?

She pictured him to herself as already in the

mine ; and seemed to see into his very soul, and to watch the fearful struggle going on there—David, half paralysed by fear, yet maintaining a firm outward aspect ; longing to be back again upon the firm safe earth outside ; yet irresistibly impelled to pursue the search begun, even after others might be willing to stop ; thinking of himself, of his want of faith in himself, and of his father's want of faith in him ; while perceiving in intensest anguish, rather than in any hopefulness of soul, how he might now *perhaps* scatter all such craven thoughts and ignoble fears like so many dead leaves to the winds, and feel they were indeed gone for ever !

She made herself so wretched by this kind of mental exercise, that she was at last constrained to get up and go to the window to look in the direction of the mine.

She knew very well she could not see it from that place, even in the daylight, but still she felt a kind of relief in letting her eyes rest in that direction. There was a slight mist, but the moon shone through the mist, and the light fell on a moving form in the garden below. She won-

dered, as all the family was supposed to be in bed ; she followed the figure with her glance, till she thought she recognised the clumsy gait of Jenkyn, the farm servant.

He drew nearer, and must, she thought, see her at the window ; but he made no sign of recognition till she raised the sash, to speak ; when his hurried gesture warned her against making any noise.

He came, and stood close under the window, bringing with him a short ladder that the gardener had been using to pick the ripened fruit. Up this he mounted till he could whisper to her as she leaned down :

‘Letter, Miss—please don’t tell master, or I’d lose my place.’

‘Don’t fear!’ she murmured in reply, taking the letter from him, and immediately closing her window, relighting her candle, and beginning to read.

‘Has he,’ she thought, while pausing, a moment in suspense, with the letter in her trembling fingers—‘Has he been thinking as I did, and resolved, wisely, not to tempt Providence?’

Oh, if he has, what a blessed relief ! But how much I shall have to do to satisfy him with himself !
Dear, dear David !’

This was the letter—

‘Dearest,—Perhaps if I could stand by you, my presence unsuspected, while you read this, I might, as I saw the relief [“relief!” murmured Nest, “how strange! the very word that was on my lips!” Then she again read the passage]—as I saw the relief my note gave, feel you knew me better than I knew myself, when you warned me to desist, and be anything but flattered by all that was involved in such a conclusion.

‘However, this is not what I have to say; and I almost think I ought not to have written the preceding sentences, but have confined myself to the subject in hand.

‘Two circumstances, then, have occurred, which I think it but right you should at once know. The first is, that I find an agent—a scientific man, and a man of great practical knowledge—therefore of infinitely greater value than I could be, has come from the Penman Coed Colliery to take

the command of the men I proposed to lead; and simultaneously I am recalled by an imperative order to London, which means, I fear, another break-down of the negotiation for capital.

‘I shall, however, bate no jot of heart or hope in struggling for *him*, and you will doubtless hear from or see me before many days have passed.

‘Till then, dearest, believe the best you can of your unhappy, perhaps unworthy lover.

From the little shed at the Craig Level.

‘P.S.—It is intentionally I avoid names, not knowing into what hands accident might place this.’

‘He is gone then!’ cried Nest, with clasped hands and tearful eyes, that yet were full of happy light. ‘He is out of danger, and not discredited. Oh, thank Heaven! This is indeed a great, a blessed relief!’

CHAPTER XIII

ISRAEL'S LIFE THEORY TESTED.

It was all the doctor could do to keep Israel to his couch for the days of rest he had consented to give; and it was more than he could do to keep him from attending to business during them.

Israel not only disobeyed and rebelled against the doctor, but managed to make him a partner in a conspiracy against himself.

‘Some letters must be written. There’s nobody but you, while my fingers are in this state. Sit down. We’ll have it over soon, and then I’ll be your model of patience for the whole neighbourhood afterwards.’

The doctor shrugged up his shoulders, but sat down, and played the part of amanuensis to his patient.

Wisely thinking it best to be himself the first to communicate the bad tidings, Israel had written immediately to Mr. Knight in London that letter which brought David so hurriedly down.

Now he made the doctor indite seven or eight urgent appeals to brother colliery owners living within some twenty miles round, all asking for farther help in his extremity. He wanted money for the injured people, who were poor, and which the doctor was to receive and distribute; he wanted superior men—agents, viewers, or managers, to come and see the mine and give counsel; he wanted a score or two of hardy, brave colliers, who were not, like his own, demoralised by the accident; and to whom he undertook to pay for the time extra wages, and allowances for special expenses. He explained that these men were wanted to take the place of the first band of explorers in case of need.

When this was done, Israel's feverish mind calmed; and he promised the doctor, who claimed an extra day's rest for his patient by way of reward for his double labours, that he would now be quiet for a little, on receiving the doctor's

assurance that Israel's own people were on the watch to do what ought to be done.

Never was rest more bitter and less wholesome to a man, in spite of the great need he had for it, than this which Israel experienced after the doctor left.

There he lay, and opposite to him the sleeping Deputy ; happily as yet unconscious of the new calamity—his wife's state, the consequences of which, indeed, Israel hardly dared to think of.

It is, however, one of the inevitable conditions of mining life that the shock experienced by the survivors from such calamities finds them prepared to bear while the immediate effect lasts, and prepared to forget the moment forgetfulness becomes possible.

As to Israel, he had perhaps never known before what such a shock meant. When mine-accidents happened he had been sorry, had rendered his due share of help, listened with patience to scorched men and to weeping women ; done, in fact, all he was expected to do, so long as he was not asked to give money—which he never did—or to display emotion which it was not in his

nature to feel—and so through long years had he been.

But now he felt as if all the terrible arrears of heartfelt sympathy, due to the many unfortunates he had known, were coming down upon him in one fell swoop, concentrated in the person of the Deputy.

At times he wished he had never seen him. Then he wished he had not so often stopped his mouth when he wanted to talk on matters deeply interesting to him, but that seemed, at the time, to Israel like feeding on husks and chaff. He would like now to have heard all Rees Thomas had wanted to say, so that he might weigh it, over and over, in these moments of forced leisure and gloom.

Then he tried to speculate on the motives of the man. Somehow, Israel, in all his past life, had never failed to satisfy himself about the characters and views of those with whom he was thrown into contact.

His plan had been simple :

First, he had laid down one broad, clear theory, that reduced all things to a kind of order, to

begin with. Every man's first object is to take care of himself. That was Israel's theory ; one which he applied with absolute rigidity to all conditions of men, and which he had never found to fail—so, at least, he had concluded.

But within this broad theory he recognised a great variety of practice. Some men cared for nothing but the theory, and would only find its limits when getting rather nigh to the criminal law ; some modified it so as to fit it to their own kindly dispositions ; some to harmonise it with the doctrines of Christianity, 'making,' as Israel used to say to himself, sardonically, 'an awful discord of the job ;' some again, would use, abuse, or manipulate the theory to suit their natural passions ;—and so there was always plenty to do for such natural, practical philosophers as Israel, while seeking to discover how this man's bent lay, or whither that woman's fancy tempted her, when he wanted to benefit by the knowledge.

But what, then, means this portentous phenomenon — this Rees Thomas — a man whose every action seems to run counter, as by the operation of an invincible law or profound in-

stinct, to Israel's life-long theory, and who is neither fool nor madman?

At least Israel thinks he is neither of these things; nay, strange to say, almost hopes so, in spite of the fact that he is conscious the Deputy's theory and his own must be hopelessly irreconcilable.

The circumstance that most puzzles him is this—Why should he, Israel, care about the Deputy's theory? If he be neither fool nor madman, what then? What is that to Israel? Can't he eat, and drink, and sleep as well as ever? Has he not just as good reason to believe in his theory now that the Deputy rejects it, as if he had accepted it; or as if he had never known any such strange heretic come to disturb the social state?

He feels mortified, and confused, as he recognises the fact that either he or his theory has changed.

Why does not the Deputy waken, sane, healthy, and strong, and narrate to him the story of his past life, his inner life, that Israel may see with his own mental eyes, touch with his own mental hands, the very fountain or source whence such a

life could spring up, grow, live, in a world like ours; conforming to it in all sorts of ways, yet at issue with it in the deepest things, and not for its own sake, but for the world's? Bah! It could not be true! It was a case of eccentricity, and Israel would think no more of it. As the doctor had said, he needed rest: he would rest.

Alas for Israel! There was to be no rest for him—except in action. Within a few minutes after making this promise to the doctor, and while he was noticing how much more regularly the Deputy breathed and how soft and noiselessly, he found himself suddenly face to face with the spectre he had known to be waiting for him, which he had avoided as long as he could without precisely fearing it, but the proportions and lineaments of which now appalled him with horror, as he prepared to confront it.

It was Ruin he beheld—ruin absolute—ruin from which there could be no escape!

The mine had existed and been worked so long without costly reparations only by aid of a constant series of tricky but skilful contrivances, to evade doing the things that needed to be done, in

order to make it reasonably safe as regarded life, and reasonably secure as regarded the capital involved. He knew that only too well.

He knew not yet the precise amount of the recent damage, but he felt assured that one result at least would follow now or very soon—that the mine must be shut up, or still larger capital obtained than he had yet asked for.

Where was he to get it, now that the security he had to offer—the mine—was so depreciated in actual value; and that again so greatly injured in commercial estimation by the accident? As Mr. Knight's employers had done, so would all other proposing capitalists do—leave him in the lurch at last.

He wondered many times, 'till indeed he was vexed with himself for so senseless a piece of self-annoyance, what the slumbering Deputy opposite him would think, if he could but know of one incident after another that now rose up in Israel's too faithful memory to trouble him; incidents where he had scented danger with unerring skill, but had concealed it from every living breast, and immediately set to work to put up obstacles

of various kinds to prevent any of the colliers touching upon these peril-spots, but not attempting any but the most trivial efforts to remove the causes of danger.

He sickened at the contemplation, and in sheer necessity of relief could not help shouting to the Deputy,

‘ Can’t you talk a bit? Do for heaven’s sake try, or I shall go mad ! ’

The Deputy rose at the summons into a sitting posture, looking, Israel thought, more like a man who had actually risen from the dead, than even from the extremest danger of death.

And it was evident, from the wandering look of his eyes, and the painful efforts that became gradually apparent in his face, that he felt for the time as one divided from all past experience by an impassable gulf.

He gazed on Israel without recognition. He stared up at the roof, and sideways at the walls of his chamber ; looked down upon his own form ; touched with the fingers of one hand the fingers of the other, as if vainly striving to know whether they were indeed his own ; then helplessly closed

his eyes, and leaned back against the heaped-up pillows behind him, and so remained for some minutes, during which Israel did not think it well to speak to him, or make any kind of effort to attract his attention, watching him, however, the while with the deepest interest.

The doctor now came in, but before he could speak to the Deputy, who looked, he thought, better, an incident occurred which turned the thoughts of all present in a new direction. Suddenly the air was rent by another tremendous explosion.

The glass in Israel's windows was broken by the concussion. He needed no one to tell him what had happened. His continual misgivings had been only too fearfully realised. The explorers, who had gone down on their chivalrous mission to re-open the mine, prepare for a renewal of the labours of the men suddenly thrown out of work, succour the wounded, if any yet lived, and bring away the dead for decent burial, these men—part of the noble army of martyrs of science, were now engulfed in that same fearful whirlpool of fire that Israel had so lately passed through.

Israel's resolution as to what he would do was formed more quickly than he could have made it known to any bystander, though for the moment he said nothing. The doctor at once offered to go and see what had happened, and hurry back with the news: an offer that was gratefully accepted.

Still the doctor delayed—as if dubious of Israel's intentions, while desiring to keep his doubts to himself.

But Israel looked as if no new calamities could hurt him. He seemed neither stunned nor overwhelmed, so far as his voice or manner or the few words he spake revealed what was passing within; but it soon became evident to Dr. Jolliffe that the unnatural self-control his presence imposed, or helped to impose, could do no good and might do much harm; so with another kindly pressure of Israel's unsympathetic hand, he took his leave.

And then Israel rose at once from his couch, and carefully and thoughtfully dressed himself. He searched for and put away in the pockets of his thick overcoat various articles likely to be

useful to himself or others—among them a flask of brandy and a quantity of biscuits—slung his safety-lamp about him, cast one look at the Deputy, and then went forth, avoiding the notice of his old housekeeper, who was half crazed to be told by a neighbour gossip a few minutes later how glad she was to see the master go forth again.

CHAPTER XIV.

THICK-COMING FANCIES.

ISRAEL before his departure took a last look of the sleeping Deputy ; and as he gazed on his face—of which he could only see the scarred side, and above it the calm, pale brow—he seemed drawn even at that critical moment, as by some kind of secret fascination, to recall one particular incident ; in spite of the superstitious fear that Rees Thomas who was a perpetual wonder to him, might have a latent power to imbibe the knowledge of it, thus set afloat in the spiritual atmosphere that hung about him.

When miners believe themselves to be approaching old and abandoned workings, which frequently become vast reservoirs of water, the law of the position is to keep on boring by the aid of a boring rod, not only considerably in

advance and directly in front of the workings, but also in diagonal lines right and left. This is done not simply to enlarge the area of rock or coal thus submitted to experiment, but in order to guard against a very fruitful source of danger, that arising from the fact that the space along any extended front may be divided into different stalls, that is, places where coal has been worked out, while pillars of coal were left standing on each side as walls. A stall or level may be safely driven in one direction, while in another there may be old and abandoned stalls, full of water.

‘Scarcely in three out of every ten cases,’ says an experienced agent, ‘is this thoroughly carried out.’ Welsh colliers, it seems, get sixpence a yard for boring. The work is chiefly done by night, so as to avoid interfering with the winning of coal, and the Overmen often take the men’s word as to the distances they have driven the boring rod.

Now as eight yards of diagonal boring are but four of actual advance, and may be fraudulently lessened to two or even one, it is easy to see what a fruitful source of danger lies in this imperfect boring

Israel had been dealing with just such a danger within the last few months, when pecuniary difficulties had become pressing, and coal must be got at all hazards. As he advanced he had bored to the right and left, and straight onward, in the direction he wanted his hewers to go, and no signs of these hidden reservoirs of water had appeared.

But one day, Israel, who was always hovering about the boring apparatus, and who was sure to be there when the borers were away near the engine to get a hot potato with their dinners—one day, at the noontide hour, Israel saw to his alarm signs in the left hand diagonal boring that caused him, without recalling the men from their refreshment, instantly to work the borer himself; and to go on as if almost madly desirous to go as far as possible before he might be interrupted by any inquisitive eyes.

He was but too successful. Easier every instant, as he did not fail to note, became the work of penetration; until at last he stopped, his face dripping with perspiration, and he stood still as if paralysed with fear.

But that was no mood for Israel long to remain in. He remembered his maps, and on remembering, was certain now, with this experience of his with the boring rod, that he was about to tap a sort of hidden under-ground lake, that would, once let loose, soon make a mere watery wreck of the whole mine.

But he also felt sure that by slightly inclining to the right his future working level, he could avoid danger for many months, and yet keep in close proximity to this watery abyss—the shape of which he knew from his maps; and so resolved not to stay all workings whatsoever in the neighbourhood, as he knew he ought to have done, but simply to close up the way on the left.

With characteristic strength of will and promptitude of purpose, he managed unaided to break off the stem of the boring-rod and to leave the greater portion within the rock; thanking his stars that no rush of water had overtaken him, and set to nought all his plans for concealment.

‘I think, Keys,’ he said, as one of the borers returned from his dinner, the smell of tobacco strong about him, and suggesting for once with

impunity a breach of the peremptory rule against smoking, 'I think we'll stop this. We're wasting time here; and might as well bore into the sides of Plynlymmon. I've had an accident—trying to withdraw the rod—but it's no matter—it was pretty well worn out. So leave this, and turn the place into a gob—for your rubbish.'

Thus Israel not only silenced possible suspicion, but prepared a buttress that would daily grow stronger, against any pressure such as water in great body often exercises with fatal effect.

Now, as he recalled the incident, his own conduct—thought nothing of at the time—seemed to startle him alike as regarded the past, present, and future.

The injury done by the explosion might not in itself be likely to set free these imprisoned waters; but there were so many possibilities contingent upon the explosion—as Falls—men imprisoned, and having to cut their way through the most unexpected places—and so on, that his heart was heavy with misgivings as he went towards the mine.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CALL OF THE FORLORN HOPE.

THE vast crowd of people that had been collected around the pit-mouth, in consequence of the second and more terrible explosion, opened, and became suddenly silent as if moved by one common impulse, when Israel appeared, and strode right onwards to the scene of all his anxieties.

He spoke to no one, looked in no one's face, but strode on, the very incarnation of silent concentrated strength, and clearness of will and purpose, till he was able to survey for the first time all that had happened outside the mine since the night of his fatal visit.

However he might be secretly affected by the ruinous condition of things, no word or look revealed the slightest touch of emotion.

'Where is Morgan?' he demanded aloud. This

was the night-Deputy mentioned in a former chapter—who had refused to go down in search of Israel, when Rees Thomas had undertaken the task.

Morgan came forward.

‘Fit up with boards and canvas a place to receive as they come up the people who may be hurt. Let every necessary be provided. Send for every available doctor. Lose not a moment. Employ whatever hands you need.’

He then began to examine into the means of going down, and found a small sheave which would enable them soon to suspend a tub to facilitate the descent. This was got ready.

A fearful task was before him. The very mouth of the pit had, in parts, lost its shape through the fall of masses of earth and rock, which doubtless blocked up the shaft at the bottom, and perhaps cut off from all access to the air those who were in the mine, and some of whom might but for that circumstance be found alive.

He turned to the vast circle of faces about him, and seemed as if he would speak to them. They

were only too conscious of what he would say, and many among the nearest began to draw back and widen out, so that no man should be in danger of being addressed individually.

In justice to the colliers, however, it must be remembered how bad was the reputation of the mine ; how long-looked for the catastrophe that had now befallen ; how much reason there was to fear that explosion after explosion would yet take place, and therefore how suicidal would be any further immediate attempt to go down.

Israel divined their thoughts, and changed his purpose ; and seeing that his own people had to some extent gathered round him in order to drive back those portions of the crowd which were little likely to be useful, he began to call out one name after another ; and wherever he heard the reply, ‘ Here ! ’ he bade that man come to him.

When he had thus called perhaps twenty persons, and obtained not more than seven answers, he stopped, surveyed the little band earnestly, yet as if no shadow of doubt about them rested on his mind, and then said—

‘I see, lads, you know for what you are wanted and that if any men in the world can do what now ought to be done, and if possible shall be done, you are the lads to do it. Fear not for your wives and little ones. There are kind hearts in the world, I find, and they will be cared for in any case. Are you ready?’

‘Well, master,’ said a voice in reply, ‘one collier is bound to do another a good turn; I vally my life as little as most folk; but it seems to me there’s been sad waste of life already, while you’ve been away.’

‘Ay? Then the more need to look sharp after it now. Lads, I ask no man to do what I shall not share in. I was, as you know, stricken down, and it’s likely I haven’t the strength to lift a man if I get the chance to save his life. But I will go first—direct, and care for you. Come!’

Again the same man was about to speak, but Israel contemptuously bade him walk away and join the crowd and talk to *them*. Then to the others he said,—

‘My lads, you do not need incitement; that is

impossible. Think, who were these men? Brothers—who came here for us, having no earthly object to serve, no gain to get, no motive but to help us.’

Still the men paused, though no one spake, and the man who had spoken stood still where he was before, looking sullenly down.

‘What if,’ continued Israel, and his voice began to thunder forth, ‘you are killing with each minute’s delay a man? What if they are cheering each other down there below with the thought of the good fellows above ground?’

The men looked uncomfortably wretched, unwilling to decide what to do.

‘All right, lads, I see I made a mistake about you. But you shan’t say you made any mistake about me. Farewell! One man at least shall do his duty this day.’

He went towards the tub, which was hanging ready; but at once there arose a cry—then a cheer—then a rousing hurrah, first from the little band—the selected forlorn hope—then from the multitudes beyond, who, unable to hear, were not the less quick to understand and appreciate.

Tools were now hastily gathered together, with which to penetrate the rubbish at the bottom of the shaft; and before this was thoroughly accomplished one volunteer after another came forward from among the crowd, to share in the desperate enterprise. And Israel could not but notice that in every case they were men whose names he had called out; and who had, after mastering their first fear, been ashamed of their silence, and at last been moved to generous emulation by the thought that he had intentionally selected them.

Israel thus found himself master of two sets of men—one to go down first, work as colliers only can work, for a short time till exhausted; then be replaced by the other set, and so the two sets to work alternately without one moment's pause in the labour.

Melancholy, anxious, terrible hours were these that now succeeded before an opening could be made through the débris at the bottom of the shaft.

The hours became days, and still there was no communication.

It was not until the latter part of the fourth

day from the explosion that the path was sufficiently clear for persons to go in and out.

And then it was found impossible to go many yards on account of the heat and the suffocating air. They learned, however, from their first attempt to advance, that the levels did not seem much worse than they had been after the first explosion.

The ventilating machinery was set to work, and great indeed was the feeling of relief to find it could work, and that in a little time the levels might be entered and the worst be known as to the fate of the party of explorers.

Not once had Israel been to the surface during the whole of this period. While the other men went regularly up and down, and derived great comfort and confidence from the fresh air, the light, and the meeting with relatives and friends, he made himself a resting-place, first in the débris, then at the bottom of the shaft, so as to get air ; and there he ate and drank, there slept—when he did sleep—having a man at his side, with orders to wake him if there appeared the slightest

necessity, and in any case not to let him sleep above three hours at any one time.

‘When a man’s body is weakened by knocking about, and by burns, and ailments of all sorts, one can’t do just what one would,’ he said, with a smile, to a new shift of men who found him asleep.

He was deceived if he fancied they needed such a remark. They were feeling a little proud of themselves, but infinitely prouder of him who had made them know themselves.

Israel’s conduct was indeed as a revelation to them. They had known him hitherto only as a hard taskmaster, and a most unscrupulous speculator with their lives in his efforts to carry on the mine profitably, without regard to its safety.

There was something to these simple men almost godlike in the stern silence of their leader; in his utter abnegation of self, while possibly he might know he was irretrievably ruined; in the unerring sagacity of his insight as to the measures necessary for properly dealing with the mine and the people in it, as they began to advance into

the interior ; in the infinite resources he brought to bear practically on the conquest of difficulties at each step of the way ; and in the extraordinary efforts he made when he got to the victims of the explosion, to remove each as swiftly as possible to the bottom of the shaft, that there they might see who lived and who had died.

Soon, therefore, the crowd at the top began to see the bucket come up at frequent intervals ; sometimes with a living but senseless freight, accompanied by one of Israel's forlorn hope ; but generally with those who had drawn their last breath in the depths below.

To the interest of all who looked on, Israel himself came up with one of the victims—a living one. This man had strayed to a part remote from the explosion, which gave him a great shock, but did not directly injure him. But as he falteringly retraced his steps, a mass of coal and timber fell upon him, and prostrated without killing him. It appeared strange to those around Israel that he should repeatedly ask about this man, whom he seemed to be sure was in the mine. It was long before any tidings of him could be obtained, but

at last Israel having got near, and being then listening, as was his wont, at every moment of pause and advance to new ground, heard a cry, and recognised it.

He found the poor fellow so overwhelmed that he could not move an inch, but his chest was free to breathe, and his legs, though bent together into a most unnatural and painful posture, were not broken.

All this Israel learned by brief but pertinent questions, and that probably, if the man could be extricated, he would live.

He cried for drink, and that was supplied in the form of weak brandy-and-water, by Israel, after a good deal of difficulty to get the tube to the man's lips. Then, as Israel listened once more to hear what he said, he distinguished the fervent ejaculations of—

‘God be praised! Christ have mercy on me! Lord have mercy on me!’

‘I knew my man,’ said Israel to himself; yes, he knew him as a friend or disciple of the Deputy, Rees Thomas; and he evidently felt more proud of the chance of this one conquest over Death

and his terrors than of all the other lives likely to be saved from the general wreck.

He worked with the men at the cutting of the timber, and in the hewing of the coal, and in the shovelling away the rubbish made, till the man was free and essayed to stand. He could not do that, but he found he was whole in limb; and was so transported with gratitude, while so enfeebled in body and mind, that he seemed about to kneel to Israel, who saw the movement, and remembering, unpleasantly, a somewhat similar incident, was shocked by it, till stopped with the words—

‘You mistake. I am a Christian, and kneel to no one but God.’

The man then asked Israel to join him one moment in prayer.

‘I will wait for you while you pray,’ said Israel.

‘And I may pray for you?’

‘Yes. Your prayers cannot harm me.’

Israel regretted his consent to stay, since it involved, he found, listening to things said about himself, in unquestionable fervency of heart and soul, that made his cheek burn, and his eyes drop

to the earth, as if they could not at that moment look up.

This was the man that Israel would not entrust to the bucket under any other charge than his own.

At the pit-mouth a great surprise awaited him. The very first person he saw was the Deputy himself, Rees Thomas, standing there pale as death ; but looking so stern and strange, that his mother-in-law who was with him did nothing but bewail him to his very face ; but not even Death could be more resolved than he.

He stepped forward, recognised the man brought up, and could not for the moment restrain his emotion as he said, and felt sorry for the moment it was said—

‘ For my sake, Israel ? ’

Israel would have lied then if he ever did lie. He could not be demonstrative—that was against his whole nature. Driven to reply something, he said, in the old harsh voice—

‘ He’s safe ! Isn’t that enough for you ? ’

The man was taken away by friends, and Israel and the Deputy stood face to face.

‘Did I not tell thee,’ began the Deputy, after gazing long and earnestly in Israel’s face, and while tears were gathering in his eyes—‘Did I not tell thee what thou wert? Israel Mort, would I could also tell thee how I honour thee—how proud I shall be to become again thy servant, when thou hast become, as thou wilt, His servant. It is not for me to sing the praises of men, but of God. The best of us, what are we but worms in his sight? Yet if thou wert to die this hour, unconverted—as thou art in forms of belief, something tells me that on Christ’s bosom there would lie no dearer soul than thine.’

‘Rees Thomas, what I am, I am. What I may be, I know not myself, therefore cannot own that you are likely to know. Suffice it to say, this language is inexpressibly painful to me, and that I will have no more of it. Dost thou hear?’

‘Ay,’ said the Deputy with a strange smile on his face.

‘Now then, to other matters. What brings you here? You cannot yet be fit to come out.’

‘Am I not? We’ll see that presently. Israel,

I have been to seek my wife. She has gone to some relative, they tell me. Surely they would not deceive me. Does she live? Did she enquire after me while I lay in my long stupor? I am racked with anxiety and wonder about her and our little boy.'

'I heard your wife singing when last I was near her,' said Israel while meditating as to how he should act.

'Singing?'

'Ay, a verse of a hymn; and since it moved me, you may judge how she sang.'

'And she is well? And the child?'

'Ay,' said Israel, 'and cared for, till you are at liberty to seek them and bring them home. I thought it best to have you at my house with me, when we were both stricken down together; and I left all the rest to the doctor, who has seen to your wife's comforts, depend on that.'

The Deputy seemed as if his heart misgave him on this point, and yet that what he had come to do did not admit of any diversion of thought or energy. So presently he said,

'Now, Israel, I hope to lighten thy task. Many

persons are below—some possibly that have life in them. Shall we go down together, or shall we take it turn by turn, just as thou hast so wisely arranged for the men?’

‘You shall do neither. Go home and get yourself strong, and then come to me.’

‘Israel, dost thou know what thou meanest when thou sayest to a man, “I have made up my mind?” That, then, is my meaning, when I say the same to thee. So let us go down together.’

‘That would be folly. A leader there must be. If I fall, you remain; that is for me a great comfort.’

‘You speak well, and have judged us both out of your own mouth. It is my turn now to go down. I claim my right.’

‘I cannot—will not consent.’

‘Israel, are you not too ambitious of glory? Can you not let your poor brother have some little hope of his name being remembered after he has passed away? However, be it as you will; only, in any case, I go down.’

‘You are as ever the most obstinate of men,’ said Israel, ‘and I must yield, I suppose. But I

warn you, that if I go home, and once touch my bed, I doubt whether even another explosion fearful as the last would waken me. I sleep now as I stand, as I walk—almost as I talk.’

‘Thank God that I have come then to your relief in so timely a manner! Ah, friend, if only you could see, as I do, His hand in all this!’

‘Rees Thomas, a word with you. These calamities may affect me severely, perhaps fatally; if so, I shall have one regret, that I ought, I think, to speak of.’

‘What is that?’

‘That I did not let you have your own way with regard to the prayers in the mine at the beginning of the day’s work, when you first asked me, so many years ago.’

‘But you did consent at last, and will abide by it in the future?’

‘Ay, if there be any future.’

‘Trust me—trust Him—there will be.’

‘And then we will talk about your position.’

‘My position! Trouble not about that. Make me your friend, let me do in God’s cause, and for my Saviour, what I feel called to do, and you

will accomplish one of the greatest of human achievements—you will have made not one, but two, fellow-creatures permanently happy, myself and my wife. Farewell, till we meet again.'

'Yes, till we meet again,' echoed Israel in a low sad voice, that seemed to hang on the words it was uttering, as if every moment new hopes and fears sprang into existence.

The Deputy put out his hand to shorten the delay that Israel, so unlike his ordinary self, seemed to want to make.

Israel took it, half unconsciously, and held it, while his face was more moved than the Deputy had ever before seen it.

Presently he passed his hand across his face, as if conscious of the display, and desirous to brush away from it all traces, and then spake:—

'Friend Rees Thomas, it is somewhat late to begin to suspect, as I do now, that I have lived all my life not in one kind of mine, as I fancied, but in two kinds; and that by far the darkest, deepest, most dangerous mine is not that you are about again to penetrate, but that other one—of the spirit—which you have penetrated; but only

for the present to enhance, by the very gleams you persist in shedding there, my own sense of the deep gloom in which you leave me. Farewell.'

'Once more, Israel, I say to you, wait—hope—trust—and all shall be well. You are fighting the noblest of fights, and it is my privilege to stand by and see you conquer.'

'Conquer! Conquer what? Myself? I am not worth any such pother. Farewell.'

There was in Israel's secret soul all through this conversation an intense desire to unburden himself of a perilous weight—his knowledge (already spoken of) of a still new and ever-pressing danger, created by his own reckless selfishness—the danger of inundation. It was his constant thought,—How long can the waters be kept out after the near approach we have made to them?

He knew he ought to tell this to the Deputy; not so much for the increased but unknown hazard to his own life—for on that point the men were at one, in their courage and their faith that

it was their duty to run all conceivable risks for the salvation of life—but because the Deputy might have it in his power to guard against the consequences of so terrific a danger.

Why, then, did he not tell him ?

Because he literally felt ashamed ; and because he feared that the knowledge of such a crime—as the Deputy would be sure to think this to be—would lose Israel the one man in the whole world whom he now most valued, most thought of, and whose counsel he most thirsted after. The good opinion of Rees Thomas had suddenly become a sort of necessity of life.

So he let him go—ignorant of that dread secret.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FATE OF THE EXPLORERS.

WHEN the Deputy relieved Israel from the arduous task of seeking for all those of the generous band of explorers who remained in the mine, he found himself at once faced by a great difficulty; he did not know how many persons had to be sought for.

The men originally in the mine on the night of Israel's and his Overman's tragical visit were thirteen or fourteen in number. These had nearly all been accounted for. The bulk of them had been found dead, and the remainder had been carried home, two only excepted. But the explorers who had accomplished this work, acting under the guidance of an agent from the Penman Coed colliery would not, as Israel heard with deep emotion, desist while even two remained. And thus they became victims to the second explosion.

The number of the explorers was known to have been twenty-seven; of these fourteen only had been found and taken to the surface by Israel: consequently nearly half the original number remained to be accounted for. Two more were discovered by the Deputy, lying dead in strange out-of-the-way places, where they had been blown by the explosion; but no efforts of exploration revealed to him the whereabouts or the fate of the remaining eleven. The chivalrous leader was unhappily among the dead.

But as time passed, and the knowledge of the Deputy's doings spread through the neighbourhood, fresh recruits offered; and he was speedily at the head of twenty hard-headed, strong-handed, energetic men, whom danger had long since ceased to appal.

And as these became exhausted with the severity of the labour imposed upon them, as much by their own earnest souls as by the Deputy's word of command, others were always ready to take their place.

Level after level was thus regained from the chaos into which falling masses of rock, coal,

woodwork, &c., had reduced them, and every hour saw increased means of communication open.

But still no traces of the eleven missing explorers!

It now grew clear to the Deputy that these men must have separated before the explosion from their fellows, probably to pursue their enquiries in a different direction.

It was also clear to him that whatever interposed between him and them could only be rubbish and falling matter, recently deposited, however much accident might have contributed to conceal the precise place.

Dividing his twenty men into four batches of five each, he sent them in as many different directions. He had previously gone before to indicate whatever spots seemed most hopeful, and there they set to work to bore into, or to make a sort of man-hole or passage through, according to circumstances.

Several hours thus passed, without any kind of reward for the labour bestowed, or for the suffering with which it was accompanied—through the heat, the foul air, and the incessant injuries

received from the crumbling, dangerous state of everything the labourers touched.

Dangerous indeed was the position—far more so than any but the Deputy knew, and he as yet knew it only indistinctly.

In more than one place where they had been boring, water oozed slowly through, and caused the Deputy to order the men to stop.

Still, he thought nothing of the incident till, in his constant passing to and fro to stimulate, advise, and direct his little groups of men, he found the water about his feet in places usually dry.

When he again came to the same place he found the water higher than before, and now he felt it a duty to own there was real, pressing, and very great danger.

Still, if only he could find these men speedily, and get them away, there would be no more lives lost. And then they could go to work pumping from outside, and so keep things tolerably safe till larger measures could be adopted, if found necessary.

But the Deputy was not the only one who fore-

saw this new terror. The men became discouraged, and some began to grumble. 'I don't believe as twenty-seven men ever came down!' said one. While another urged, 'In the confusion at the pit-mouth they hadn't correctly reckoned all that Mr. Mort had got out.' And, in fine, the belief became general that they were risking life for nobody's benefit, and that it was natural they should think it time to stop.

But the Deputy knew that if there was one man in the world to be trusted to take count correctly, even under such circumstances, it was Israel; and he assured them they had only to go on, and great indeed would be their reward and satisfaction.

And so it proved. At one place where they had been working in the sort of hopeless spirit of which we have spoken, it was not long before they stopped; and, the Deputy being elsewhere, began seriously to comment on his evident anxieties about something he didn't talk of; and to take counsel with each other whether they would not at once march off in a body, and abide no more words with their unreasonable leader.

But while, at the first mention of this project by one of their number, they stood gazing irresolutely in each other's faces, and in a silence that no one was willing to break, the stillness was broken by a dull yet distinct sound that in an instant electrified every face, and freshly nerved every hand and heart.

‘There they are! There they are!’ was the general cry.

One instantly ran to fetch the Deputy, who, when he came, looking flushed and agitated, ordered all to be silent and motionless while he knocked with a pick, and with the peculiar and timed blows only known to the collier, of one—two; one—two—three—against the side in the direction of the sound, as indicated to him, and then listened.

‘Thank God!’ he murmured. ‘They are there—and will soon be here. The sound is so clear that there cannot be much betwixt us. But lose not a moment! This time is ours. Who shall say how long it may remain so? Quick! and we may all be out of the mine in half an hour!’

The influence of that thought, added to all that

had gone before, put such new heart into the men's toil, that in a very few minutes they heard a voice, and all stopped to listen.

It seemed to them as if the voice spoke as from the grave :—

‘ We’ve been knocking with our boot-heels for the last three days or more.’

‘ How many ? ’

‘ Eleven ! ’

‘ All living ? ’ asked the Deputy.

‘ We’re all dying,’ grumbled the voice.

‘ All right ! ’ shouted the Deputy cheerily back, and then would not allow another moment to be lost for pauses of any kind.

He seemed to watch with extreme jealousy any delay between the strokes of the picks, which fell faster and stronger, and yet he could not help pleading in a broken, passionate voice—

‘ Faster ! Harder ! Lest we be all overtaken together ! ’

Had they known what he knew, they would probably have thrown down their tools, and fled, and have smitten him to the earth had he attempted to stay them.

Was he doing right to conceal the truth from them ?

That doubt was the sting in his soul—not fear of any kind for himself.

He could not resolve it to his own peace and satisfaction. There were the lives within the barrier to balance against the lives without it. What endangered the one class might save the other. There was the assured certainty that a few minutes more would set them all free together to escape !

Ay, but would there be those few moments accorded ?

Yes, if no sudden rush of the waters broke in upon them—he was sure of that. The silent, almost imperceptible, increase in the parts whence the Deputy had just come might go on for hours without endangering them ; but the fact of the increase of water was itself so alarming that he knew not what he ought to do.

Ah, what relief ! With what transports of joy and pious thankfulness does the Deputy note the sudden stop of the picks, the gathering at a point, the rending away with hands of pieces of half-

removed rubbish sticking out from the side of the small opening, and then the drawing forth of a man ; and before there is time to welcome him, as he rose staggeringly to his feet, another, and another, till the whole eleven are forth.

And wonder of wonders—the last of the eleven is David, Israel's son ; who knew the Deputy instantly, and could not resist a kind of passionate cry to him, which made him known to Rees Thomas before his words had time to convey the truth.

With the miner's usual thoughtlessness in such matters, David's companions had taken down no food with them beyond that which sufficed for nourishment during any accidental delay that might occur to keep them for a few hours longer than they intended in the mine. But David, who had joined them as a volunteer after their descent, and who had filled his pockets with sandwiches and biscuits enough to have kept him quite free from hunger during the whole four days, shared all he had with the others ; and made one or two men who had been also provident follow his example, though very reluctantly. Thus it was

ten more of the explorers were saved, besides David—one only having succumbed.

How David came to be there may be explained in few words. After he had sent off his note to Nest, he found himself so thoroughly wretched—so profoundly convinced he had been using circumstances to evade legitimate duties—so moved once more at his father's thought of him—if he should know how he had fallen back at the critical moment—or if he should know on the other hand that he had gone down, and bravely acquitted himself—all these thoughts combining, made him suddenly resolve to descend at once into the mine; and he did so without allowing himself a single moment's pause for further reflection.

The two men could not at first speak to each other as they met. It seemed no place or time for converse such as their hearts needed. A mutual grasp of the hand, that made each feel how dear the other was to him, how full of intensest gratification the meeting, and that was all for the moment. But as the other explorers moved on, and left them a little behind, the Deputy's arms opened, there was a silent embrace,

and then a few murmured words from him to David:—

‘Oh, I did not know this! did not suspect this. I recognise a higher power in this! God must have moved me to risk so much for all these brave men here, intending to reward me by giving thee! Eternal blessings to His name! But come—hurry! David, the waters are coming in upon us. But we shall escape! I shall take you to your father, and make known to him who and what you are!’

When they turned to look round, they were alone.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FOUNTAINS OF THE DEEP BREAK UP.

As the two men had their danger thus unexpectedly brought home to them, they hurried after their companions.

They had not gone far before one of these men came running back, crying excitedly :

‘The way is stopped! I have been up to my neck in water, and couldn’t get any farther.’

‘Try other ways, then!’ shouted the Deputy. ‘Take you the one to the right, we will go to the left; come back if you fail, to see if we have succeeded.’

Away they all went, but all came back, and not the three only, but others—one, two, three at a time, and all with the same story. When they reached a certain lower point they found the water so deep as to be impassable.

Horror stricken they gaze upon each other in the faintly-illumined darkness, their faces dripping with sweat and blackened with grime.

‘Let us pray,’ cries the Deputy.

‘No time for that now,’ responds a coarse, hard voice. ‘Can’t you hear?’

In a sense he was right; for as they listened they did hear a fearful rush and tumult and surging of water through the mine: the fountains of the deep had broken up!

It was David’s turn now to speak:—His voice trembled with emotion, but the listeners were probably too much pre-occupied to notice the fact.

‘We can’t get out, that is certain; but we may live within till succoured, if we can only reach a high level. I saw such a place. Who knows where it is, and how to get at it?’

‘My child, you have saved us!’ cried the Deputy, holding up his lamp, and gazing in David’s face as if he found new light and life in the remembrance of the wisdom to be found in babes and sucklings. To him David was still anything and everything but one of the prosaic

mass of mankind from whom youth and its sentiment and poetry have passed never to return.

He led the way along one of the levels that had been ineffectually tried for escape, but on reaching a certain point, instead of turning to the left, which led downwards, and then on towards the shaft, he turned to the right, and went up a somewhat steep incline.

Cries of horror broke from behind him.

‘Run! Make way!’

He turned, and saw—dimly—forms rushing up, huddled together, overthrowing each other, but swiftly rising again; and lo! in another minute, they were all enveloped by the waters of the inundation.

The Deputy had since meeting David lost to some extent the singleness of heart and purpose that previously characterised him. It was not that he was not as willing as ever to yield up his life for the safety of his companions, as full of abounding love for them, which he desired to show by teaching them of that other and Divine love which he believed had not deserted them even in this fearful strait; no, but he was

physically weak and ill, and felt he could no longer think of those things only, but also, and chiefly of David—of the saving him—of the taking him to Israel ; an idea that was entrancing.

Every step, therefore, he moved in the mine he moved in the closest possible proximity to David. He could not bear to lose sight of him even for an instant ; and thus, when the dreadful rush of the inundating waters overwhelmed them, he found himself suddenly drawn up upon a slippery shelf of rock by friendly hands, and the next instant was able, from his point of vantage, to save David.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MINER'S ARARAT.

THE shelter thus found by the Deputy and David and by the friendly collier who had preceded them, and in effect guided both to it, was a natural ledge in the rock ; which consisted of soft shale, the surface sloping downward and very slippery ; so that it was difficult for the many men who were struggling in the water to climb up to it. But by mutual help, and by digging—some with their hands, some with the hooks of their lamps—they were all got up, all at least who lived to struggle ; for as yet it was impossible to say how many had been carried away by the first great rush of the waters, or how many more had dropped helplessly and been lost during the fierce contest for the only place of security offered.

But at last they all sat on this narrow ledge, which extended for a short distance on both sides of the incline ; a woful company ; listening to the fall of the drops which trickled down from their saturated clothes into the water. They were as silent as if they waited not for death to make them so ; except once, when the silence was broken by a solitary moan from a youth, which at once called forth a loud symphony of sighs and groans, and prayers and exclamations that welled forth in irrepressible anguish from the colliers' breasts.

The waters came up to their feet, and so confined and pressed upon the air, that they felt as men feel who go down for the first time in a diving bell. All sorts of noises were in their ears. And when anyone tried to speak to his neighbour, he found he had no longer free use of the organs of speech.

A great thirst seized some of the men, and they leaned down—others holding them the while—to scoop up the water in their hands, and drink. But nothing, surely, more horrible ever entered into the soul of man, than the sickening disgust

they experienced at the smell of that water, which had been so long stagnant in the abandoned pit.

To add to the misery of their situation, as time passed the lamps began to go out, one after another, for want of oil, till at last they were in total darkness.

How was it the Deputy was silent—now when the captives needed the spiritual comfort he could so well give?

The very first moment that he had known all the men were safely raised to that shelf of rock which seemed to him a kind of new Ararat, he had begun to lift his voice in terms of warning against sleep. They must not do that, he said. He conjured them to listen to him. Sleep would be as dangerous to them as to Arctic voyagers, overtaken in some desperate land-journey—where the very words sleep and death became synonymous.

And as he spoke his voice grew more and more feeble, and at last ceased altogether.

And David knew he was asleep.

But David believed the Deputy was mistaken, and that under their present condition sleep would

be more beneficial than dangerous, so did not attempt to disturb his friend.

Yes, he had fallen asleep. His little strength was utterly exhausted. As we have seen, he was but an invalid newly come from the chamber of sickness; and the state of the air and the heat probably helped to deprive him of all power to do what his heart yearned to accomplish.

But Nature is as wise as she is kind. The Deputy could do little now. The calamity was too great for words, however sweet, precious, and holy, to assuage it. Time must be given and sleep.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FIRST NIGHT OF CAPTIVITY.

A FEARFUL night followed for those who did not sleep. There was an old man who was so restless that David, who sat next to him, warned him he would fall off and be drowned in the water. Finding his exhortations of no avail, David grasped him by his waist, and so held him till he too lost all consciousness in slumber, and regained it in a fright—but only in time to find the old man had slipped down, and disappeared, raising no cry, and eluding all David's efforts, who vainly stooped to snatch at him in the water, which he could only feel, not see.

David resolved to say nothing of this, lest it might lead others to do the same. But it taught him a lesson, which he immediately put to practical use. He began to dig away at the shale, so as to make the seat level, and to incite others who

were awake to do the same. The Deputy, who was on the other side of him, was still among the sleepers, as David anxiously satisfied himself from time to time by listening for the sounds of his breathing; but he woke him, and constrained him to exertion—for the Deputy was overmastered by sleep or stupor, and was very loth to engage in any effort. But with David's help, both seats were thus made secure.

One circumstance greatly comforted David, who as a student in practical science, and especially well informed in all that related to mines, promptly saw its extreme importance—that the air, apart from the pressure upon it, was better than might have been reasonably expected, and likely to remain so.

David guessed what was the truth of the case—that the very calamity that imprisoned them brought a certain quantity of fresh air into the mine.

These old abandoned pits have each their shaft, which gets filled with rubbish and roofed over, and will so remain as long as the masses of water about them are quiescent; but should the water

find vent and be drawn away, the rubbish falls, and gets more and more loose, and so allows air to percolate through the old shaft into the mine.

David slept—how long he knew not—and then began for him a night, the awful terrors of which he would never after be able utterly to forget. The first thing that disturbed him was that a youth higher up, who was raging with fever and thirst, would get down into the water : partly, it seemed, to drink, but also with a half-insane hope of finding a way through the water, and through the rubbish that made progress so difficult and uncertain. He descended till the waters were up to his lips, then gave a fearful scream, to which David responded by a call to him to come back ; and guided by the voice, the youth came back ; and froze David's blood with horror as he whispered to him in passing to his place that in putting his lips to the water to drink, he had kissed the face of a dead man. Some unseen hand got hold of him, and restored him to his seat, and by degrees the poor fellow was quieted, and slept, but soon woke again with a scream, saying the devil had offered him some

of the water to drink, and made him swallow it—and then told him with a grin it was the blood of his drowned comrades.

An inexplicable noise connected with the water gave David's sad thoughts new, but scarcely less painful, occupation. It seemed to him he heard sounds that indicated another inundation was about to burst upon the doomed mine; but the gloom changed as if sudden sunshine had broken in upon it. He recognised the measured movement made by the sound, and knew it was the pump at work, and that men—perhaps under the direction of his father, Israel—must be labouring for their relief.

Some of the colliers who were at the highest point of this mount of rest and safety, and where they could stand at the water's edge, stooped with their faces close to the water, disregarding the loathsomeness of it, and drank in greedily the faint puff of wind that came along the surface, with every pressure of the pump.

Yes, David thought, his father was at work for them—and for him—but still, neither he nor any one else, outside, knowing who and where he was!

Had he been right so long to conceal himself? he asked many times during the terrors of the night; which, however, was not night only; for night passed into morning, unknown to him and his companions.

Again he slept; but, as it seemed to him, only for a few minutes, when he was awakened by the sound of a high-pitched voice—that of the Deputy, who was light-headed, and seemed to be angry that he did not get certain men sent up in a cage to bank.

‘It’s a queer thing,’ he said, ‘the pit’s been drawing coals all day; these men have done their work well; and now you won’t let them be sent to bank.’

David, with a deep sigh of relief, heard him after a little while again breathing the quieter breath of sleep.

Other men now woke, and some of them in so quarrelsome a mood that blows were struck.

A peacemaker interposed, but David heard him thrust back by others, while one among them muttered, ‘Let them fight it out with their knives; if a man is killed we may eat him for food.’

CHAPTER XX.

AN UNHEROIC HERO.

FROM the occurrences narrated in the last chapter, David learned that some portion of the incline was not deep in water.

He resolved to stay where he was no longer, but do something even if only to keep off the thoughts that preyed upon him.

Rising with great care to his feet and arching his body when his head touched the roof, he managed to walk along, between or behind the men that interposed, till he reached the furthest point of the ledge, and was obliged to descend.

Continuing his course in the same direction through the water, he found to his great satisfaction a place where there was scarcely any water about his feet.

Whether this was due, as he hoped, to the fact that the water had not only reached its highest point, but was subsiding, or that it meant he had reached a higher level than the water had yet risen to, it was a comfort for the moment, and might admit of operations calculated to ameliorate their condition.

He soon managed to get two or three men together, able and willing to help, and one of these had fortunately lighted upon a mandril or pick. With this they sounded the walls on both sides of them, moving slowly along till they found a place that seemed to give a hollower sound than they had yet heard, and here they began to work to open a hole. They succeeded more quickly than they had expected in reaching a vacant place of some kind, where there seemed to be plenty of room ; but before they could go about it and thoroughly examine it with their hands, they found the fire-damp so strong, that in obedience to David's sudden call they all retreated ; and with their jackets covered up the entrance, hastily, in the best way they could ; and then the little party sat down deeply discouraged.

Other men had come round them in the darkness. One of these said :—

‘We had better close up the hole thoroughly, or we shall have the gas in here.’

‘Let it alone,’ cried another in a hard unnatural voice ; ‘we may have to take a light in there, and blow ourselves up !’

David thought it time to remonstrate in terms of severity against this wild, foolish talk ; but scarcely had he spoken half-a-dozen words before he heard the sound of a match lighted, and saw the blaze, which increased sufficiently for him to have a glimpse of the fearful looks of the man who held the match ; but he paused no longer, and believing the lighted match was about to be thrust into the place where the gas was, he rushed upon him, struggled with and threw him to the ground, and in the struggle the match went out, and once more there was darkness.

‘Madman!’ was all David could say, as, breathless, he rose on one knee, and quitted his hold of his antagonist.

The man muttered something that David could not understand.

‘Do you know that every match is here of inestimable worth—that our lives may depend upon our power to obtain light even for so brief a space as that will give us?’

‘Do you mean to say, master, there is a ghost of a chance for us?’ asked the man sullenly, but as if opening his ears to conviction.

‘There is an excellent chance for men, intelligent men, but not for fools and—David paused for a moment, then gasped out the word he had been going to say—and cowards! Will you give me what you have?’ There was no reply for perhaps half a minute, then David heard him say—

‘There! And much good may it do you!’

David put out his hand to feel for that of the other, found it, and also found himself master of a good-sized box, quite full of matches.

He felt as if he could have kissed and hugged the man, and not simply forgiven him for what he had intended to do.

But the secret of his emotion was not the value he attached to the matches, but that the man had called forth a word of reproof—the very sound of which on his—David’s—lips—seemed at once an

inexplicable wonder, and an inestimable comfort. He call other men cowards—and not hear in reply, a universal hiss of scorn! He could not understand it—but somehow felt it was a new pledge given to fortune. He must play the hero now, however essentially in himself unheroic.

David thought and thought and thought till he was tired of thinking about the place they had penetrated into and so suddenly abandoned, perhaps unwisely.

The water could not subside for many days, and possibly might not admit of a free passage even for weeks.

Could they live all that time? Impossible.

Would it not, then, be better to risk life now in trying to open communication with some part of the mine where they might obtain the means of living? And such a part there was within reach—so David was half inclined to believe from his previous explorations and studies of Israel's plans (such of them be it observed, as Israel had chosen to show) if only they could find a safe route.

He suggested what he thought to the man who

had given up the matches, who was so moved by it that he rose at once to his feet, began to speak to a friend about it, and offered himself to fire the gas.

Others were then taken into counsel, till all who could be readily collected together were found to be of one mind—that David was right.

There was then a deep and prolonged silence. Every man thinking of what must be the hazard of that first step.

David's own voice when he at last essayed to speak, was so tremulous that he stopped—murmured something about the cold—then with renewed and painful efforts, which he tried to disguise by the familiarity of his address to them, began thus :

‘Now lads,’ said David, ‘let us face the truth. The danger is great. If the gas is confined to the small place we have been in, it is not likely to hurt us. If, on the contrary, it communicates with large quantities of gas beyond, then to fire the gas will be in all probability to bring swift destruction on us all. Are you content?’

‘Ay! Ay!’ murmured some of the men,

while others only answered by an in-drawing of breath and a gasp, scarcely to be distinguished from a groan.

But who would undertake the desperate work of the initial step—the firing of the gas?

No one asked the question, and yet all felt it was asked; and for a brief awful space there was again dead silence: even the volunteer of a few minutes ago was mute now.

David's heart sank within him, as he asked himself whether the man had changed his purpose or only waited to be spoken to.

Had not the decided tone of his own speech to them been greatly due to his supposition there was a volunteer ready?

At last, the man, as if conscious of all eyes being on him—even in the black midnight of the pit, said in a half-hearted sort of way, 'I'm willing to try!'

Then David thought of his father's old ideas of him, of all he had said to Nest, and, no longer allowing himself time for reflection, consciously hurried himself into speech.

To the astonishment of all, David refused to

allow the volunteer to undertake so desperate a risk, which might kill him, and yet save the remainder by the success of the scheme.

‘No,’ said David, though his voice shook as he spoke, and sounded not in the least resolute. ‘No ; as I proposed, I am bound to carry out my own plan. Withdraw, all of you, down the incline as far as you can. There is no gas here, so if the plan succeeds you have only to guard against the violence of the air shock. Farewell ! If—if I die, say to—to the Deputy—and to all who care for me how I died. Farewell.’

Many shook hands with him, and then they all moved away, all except the one man who had given up the matches, who swore with an oath—for which he apologised immediately after to David—that he would stick to him, and help him if he could.

David took a newspaper from his pocket, opened it, then crumpled it lightly together into a little heap, and thrust it within the hole and into the unknown space beyond as far as he could, lying on his breast the while.

Then he took one of the matches and lighted it,

while guarding his face, and committing his soul to God. And then he thrust forward the lighted match to the paper.

The instantaneous storm of fire did not come. Neither the match nor the paper would burn. For a moment he knew not what to do. Suddenly he recollected that the gas must be too dense, and needed admixture of air. He crawled back and fanned air into the place, and again repeated his operations;—with the same result; though the light did not go out so instantaneously. For a third time he contended, and this time successfully. An explosion took place—by no means a serious one—and which did him no harm whatever.

He entered the place, lit another match, and saw he was in a natural hollow of the rock, quite uninjured either by the previous explosion or by the inundation.

A second glance inspired a thrill of joy. He saw an opening leading to another level. In hurriedly feeling round the place in the darkness he had missed this.

The level led him into the part he expected to

find—a large district that had been worked and abandoned, much of which was on the same high-level as their place of shelter.

But a most important idea was immediately suggested to David. He remembered quite well to have noticed that the stable with some horses, and an engine for pumping water, and some sort of store place for candles, oil, and various things often required in the mine were all located close by this abandoned district; and lay, not high certainly, but still above the lowest levels, and therefore might possibly be got at in this way, while by the ordinary route they were quite inaccessible.

With a quickening pulse he hastened to verify his hope, but while he satisfied himself he was right as to the localities, he found unhappily the water much too high to admit of his reaching either the stable, the engine place, or the little store place.

He went back, however, in good heart to communicate his news to the Deputy, if only he should be well enough to listen to him and understand him.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MINER'S PSALM.

DAVID found the Deputy seeking him in the place where the entrance had been made from the incline. He was, or seemed to be, much recovered, and full of grief that so much time had been lost.

He certainly had regained all his clearness of intellectual vision, and David took care to ask no questions that might suggest to the Deputy the state from which he had just escaped.

His first great satisfaction seemed to be that they had now room to assemble together and to move freely about ; and he begged David to draw all the men down from their dangerous perch, and to be careful not to lose a single one.

‘Life enough has been sacrificed, and for which some of us perhaps may have to answer to our

common Father, so let us be careful now. Quick, David, my son, for I have something to say to them and to you.'

The men soon came hurrying into the new place of shelter; and were about to disperse through the different roads in the search for whatever they might find promising present relief or future extrication, when the Deputy raising his voice, cried—

'The water is there too. You will only lose time. Listen to me!'

They gathered accordingly, marshalling themselves as well as they could in the darkness into some sort of order, and then the Deputy began—

'Brothers, have we not already even in this state of darkness and terror enjoyed the inestimable benefit of God's mercy? Speak, you whom He moved to come to our succour—though strangers to us—speak, you whose lives have been spared during four fearful days and nights of anguish. We, who have been but as instruments in your redemption, seeking to pay back what you generously lent—risk for risk, life against life—we speak to you now, and ask you now also to

speaking as men, brothers, Christians, to the harder hearts among us, who think the war of the elements is not enough to overwhelm us, but they must raise the infinitely more evil, wicked, and senseless war of man's own violent, reckless passions.

‘O my brethren, heirs as ye are to the most inestimable dowry that the soul of man can conceive—Christ's love—will you refuse this at your Maker's hands, and turn your backs to Him, and for what? only that you may stand face to face with the devil, with the enemy of man, who no doubt waits to embrace you and hold you fast enough, if only you so will it!

‘Blows have been stricken, I hear, though I bless my God He did not let me hear them; but, oh, my brethren, I feel them, ay, a thousand times more keenly than those on whom they were inflicted.

‘But I will not dwell, as I intended, on the crimes beyond this sad beginning that have followed or might have followed. Let us only whisper it among ourselves with the shuddering horror of men who have human hearts, that there

is no extremity of evil to which we may not go if we once give way—suicide, murder, cannibalism lie at the one end of the dreadful balance where our fate is suspended; peace, hope, brotherhood at the other. Which then shall it be? Choose.

‘Death! And is that so awful that we can wish to evade it by atrocities that blister the lips but to speak of?’

‘Death! Miners, and not know how to die! Ah, my brethren, shall I tell you in deep humility of heart and bitter distress of soul that death to me, if in dying I could keep you all alive, would be so sweet, that I should feel recompensed for a long life of trouble?’

The listening miners could no longer contain themselves, but burst out—several speaking at once—

‘Ay! ay! We believe that. That is true, master! O God, help us! God, help us! He only can!’ ‘And our wives!’ ‘And children!’

Such were the exclamations that now burst forth on all sides, mingled with tears and sobs, and passionate wringing of hands, and convulsive beating of breasts.

‘Listen! Listen to me! I command you. What would you say if I could prove to you that God has expressly foreseen all you now suffer, the very place in which you are, and has inspired the very words and thoughts best calculated to express for you your own emotions?’

‘Where? Where? Tell us!’ some cried in voices of intense earnestness, while others asked, but so despairingly as to show they wished for no answer,—

‘What does he mean?’

‘Ah, my brethren, see what you must be made to endure before you will know your true friends, but let us also see that when you are made you do indeed prize them.

‘Hearken, then, to the words of the inspired Psalmist, draw comfort from them, such comfort as the truth can best afford. I am not striving to teach you how to live, but how best to die, if you must die!’

The sounds of anguish and cruel disappointment called forth by these words stopped the Deputy for a minute or two, as though he were himself too deeply affected by the grief and despair to go on.

Perhaps he was thus induced to change his purpose, and seem less stern as to what he desired to say about their fate.

‘I hear all about me signs and tokens of heart-rending anguish. I cannot quarrel with that. I am like you, brothers—my own dear brothers—but a frail man, and feeling pain in every nerve of my body, and fear and anguish and doubt alternating with hope and faith and joy in every effort of my soul, while I see death on the one hand, and escape on the other.

‘Let me, then, so far as I dare, bid you yet be of good cheer.’

‘You mean ——’ burst out one loud passionate voice.

‘I mean that the men who will be resigned, patient, brave for death, truly so, mind! no hypocrisy of believing all the while they are not going to be tested :—I mean—I say—that for such men God may yet do great and wonderful things, and that if we trust to Him we shall acquit ourselves worthily, whether it be for living or dying.’

‘There’s hope in that man’s soul, though he’s afraid to tell us so!’ muttered some voice during a

deep, significant pause, and others took up the cry, so that a low, buzzing, animated sound ran through the place.

‘Now, brothers, listen to what the Bible can tell us about our condition—we poor miners. Do you not already feel, as I do, a kind of light streaming through our hearts, at the thought of having God, or, what is the same thing, God’s inspired prophet, standing among us and speaking in this cause for us?’

‘I hope my memory will not fail me! I do hope that!’

‘The psalm I am about to try to repeat to you has been my comfort and solace many and many a dark hour—ay, darker than that of the deepest pit.

‘Draw round me—as nigh as you can. My voice is yet but feeble. And I would not have you lose one word of words all so inestimable. Listen then with all your hearts:—

‘O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before Thee;

‘Let my prayer come before Thee: incline Thy ear unto my cry;

‘For my soul is full of troubles : and my life draweth nigh unto the grave.

‘I am counted with them that go down into the pit : I am as a man that hath no strength :

‘Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom Thou rememberest no more : and they are cut off from Thy hand.

‘Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps.

‘Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and Thou hast afflicted me with all Thy waves. Selah.

‘Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me ; Thou hast made me an abomination unto them : I am shut up, and I cannot come forth.

‘Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction : Lord, I have called daily upon Thee : I have stretched out my hands unto Thee.

‘Wilt Thou show wonders to the dead ? Shall the dead arise and praise Thee ? Selah.

‘Shall Thy loving kindness be declared in the grave ? or Thy faithfulness in destruction ?

‘Shall Thy wonders be known in the dark ? and Thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness ?

‘But unto Thee have I cried, O Lord ; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent Thee.

‘Lord, why castest Thou off my soul ? why hidest Thou Thy face from me ?

‘I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up : while I suffer Thy terrors I am distracted.

‘Thy fierce wrath goeth over me ; Thy terrors have cut me off.

‘They came round about me daily like water ; they compassed me about together.

‘Lover and friend hast Thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.’

One might well despair of any attempt even to suggest an adequate notion of the effect produced by the Deputy’s recital of this psalm, the eighty-eighth. It was accompanied, at the close of every verse after the third, by low but most fervent and passionate ejaculations—at first confined to a few persons, but their numbers increasing with every verse, till at the close, the self-control of the miners, and their intense de-

sire to let no word escape them, gave way, and indescribable indeed became the scene.

But the Deputy, whose instincts were so vivid and true that he understood—nay, anticipated every change their behaviour exhibited, knew now that they were no longer the same men they had been a little while before ; that the hearts and minds of all were greatly lifted up, and that from that moment he might almost deal with them as he pleased.

As the profound agitation became a little lessened, one voice from a far corner cried out—

‘Again, Master ! Again ! Blessed words ! Since these are all we have to hope for, feed us with them. Let us not go hungry of soul unto death !’

‘Ay !’ ‘Ay !’ ‘Again !’ ‘Again !’

But David here interposed. The Deputy, as he ceased, had leaned against him, and presently took David’s hand. The young man felt how he trembled, and saw that he would never pass alive through many such scenes as this.

‘The Deputy is ill,’ he said. ‘Of course he

will not tell you that. But I do.' Can we afford to lose him?'

'I'm afraid if we do,' said one man, too well known among the colliers for his irreligious life and conversation, 'that'll be the same for me as losing God and Christ into the bargain—for I've only just gotten to believe in 'em a bit.'

'I propose, then,' said David, 'that we ask him to write for us on the wall these holy and precious words—so that they may belong to us all—be ever ready to comfort us when we need them. For my part I own how deeply I am ashamed to say, I make practical acquaintance with this wonderful miner's psalm for the first time. Were you not all in the same condition?'

'Ay!' 'Ay, master!' was the response from several voices.

'Is there anyone here who had before to-day realised it as he now realises it? If so, let him speak.'

No one did speak.

Some conversation in a low tone now took place between the Deputy and David, and those

around them began to fear the former was too ill even to do what was asked.

He revived, however, by drinking some water ; and then the question was about the light.

The lamps were collected, and by the aid of the matches it was seen that a small quantity of oil, sufficient to fill one lamp, was obtainable.

And so, after a time, the Deputy was able to see to write with chalk on the smooth surface of the coal—which happened to be well suited for the purpose—the psalm he had recited, and which all now agreed to call evermore—if an ‘evermore’ there should be found for them—as David had called it, the Miner’s Psalm.

But when he had gotten part way through, and reached the verse:—*Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps*, he stopped and cried aloud with an enthusiasm that was electrical, ‘*The lowest pit no more! Glory to His name!*’—and then, overpowered by the grand cry that broke simultaneously from all hearts of ‘*Glory to His name!*’ he fainted ; and would have fallen but for David, who watched him with the most unfaltering care and devotion, and supported

him in his arms till he revived, and while the remainder was inscribed by David, at the Deputy's dictation.

When he had done, the Deputy whispered something faintly to David, who spake out in a loud, manly voice,

‘The Deputy wishes me to say how he shares congratulations with you on the testimony we leave behind us for our dear ones to reflect on—if’—but there David stopped, as if to listen to something the Deputy wanted to say to him.

Then again David spoke aloud:—

‘He begs that all will now be calm, and he hopes in a few hours to speak to you again practically as to what he thinks may and ought to be done. I have assured him that it shall be so, and that he may rest in the absolute confidence that we shall try to acquit ourselves as men worthy of such a leader. Is it not so?’

‘Ay! ay!’ was the universal response; and then the men sat or lay down wherever they could best accommodate themselves, to ponder over all that he had said, and on all that he might yet be going to say.

For as David could not but see, there still lingered in the hearts of all not only the hope of life, but the belief that the Deputy shared the hope ; but was afraid of being untrue to the mission he had received relative to another and better world, if he too soon comforted them in connection with the world in which they still were, and in which they very much yearned to stay.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ROLL-CALL.

THE Deputy's first use of recovered strength was to make David summon the whole of the men together, and begin the work of government.

It was full time. The good effect of the Deputy's late appeal was fast wearing off, and the pangs of hunger and thirst, the intolerable heat and darkness of the mine, the growing sense of languor—which seemed only to change, if it changed at all, into a restless, irritable, passionate, and at times, almost frenzied despair—all this took the place of the resignation as regards this world, and the holy faith as regarding another, that the Deputy had succeeded for a brief time in infusing into their hearts.

And when the work began of collecting the men for the introduction of the new state of things

the Deputy was shaping out in his thoughts, it took more time than he and David had calculated on.

The miners had become moved by all the natural variety of individual impulses their position was calculated to bring forth : some desiring the society of the crowd, some of particular friends or acquaintances, some finding relief only in solitude, and jealously concealing themselves where in the darkness they could not easily be found.

But at last they were all drawn together, and the Deputy took a paper from his pocket, calling aloud for David—who, though he knew it not, was as usual close to him—and demanded if there was oil enough yet in the lamp for him to read by for a few minutes.

It turned out there was. The lamp was lighted, and by the faint illumination David examined his paper ; which showed a list of names—numbered in the margin from one to twenty-one—the last being the Deputy's own : David's not included (for he had come down alone and unrecognised), nor the names of the saved explorers.

David knew what the list meant, and was in

no difficulty as to what to do when the Deputy, in a high-pitched, much shaken voice, bade him begin.

‘James Morgan!’ cried David in a tone that no one could fail to hear or understand.

‘Here! God be praised!’ was the reply.

‘Hiram Holt!’

The call was heard in silence.

‘Is he dead?’ asked the Deputy in a low voice of those around him.

‘No—I only wish he were!’ responded Hiram Holt himself, then first breaking silence. ‘You and the rest are only too good—too pious a company for such as me.’

‘Feed my sheep!’ said the Deputy, in a voice that seemed addressed as much to his own inquiring, doubtful soul, asking what ought to be done, as to Hiram Holt. ‘What did the Saviour mean by that? Would He—even He—with all He had to say to such a world, have scorned that food which the body needs for nourishment? No. Hiram Holt, neither will we. Let it be thy task to take possession and to sacredly guard for the use of all whatever thou canst find or come at

that may help us to pass through this dreadful valley of the shadow of death, which, after all, may be only the shadow.'

'Dost thou say so?' said Hiram Holt, half mockingly. 'Where then shall I begin? Methinks my labours of collector will soon be over. I know not even of a candle-end within reach; shall I begin with our leather boots?'

'Begin with stripping the bark from the props. The inner bark of those recently put up is soft, and can be chewed; and of those not so lately put up, the pulpy matter crumbles to the hand, and may be eaten after maceration in water; and thus—bad as the case is—we may still extract sufficient nourishment to keep the flame of life burning within, however feebly, for some little time—several days if need be—while the water subsides a little. "All flesh is grass," says the inspired Book, and science teaches us how the vegetable and animal world melt into each other.'

'Well, and then?' demanded Hiram Holt.

'Then we may be able to get to the candle store, and to the horses, and to oil for our lamps; and then, Hiram, with that food, I rely on

thee as an honest man, to have and permit no concealments, but to work for all, as all shall work for thee."

'I accept the trust,' said Hiram, evidently gratified at the way in which the Deputy had dealt with him.

The roll-call went on :—

'Patrick Sullivan !'

'Here and hearty—sir, at your service ! Least-ways, as well as can be expected, and much glory to God, and many thanks to you !' cried a warm-hearted Irishman.

'Charles Dorman !'

'Here, sir—hoping to live—willing to die, and trusting all to the blessed Redeemer. Christ be praised ! Lord be praised !'

'James Knott !'

No reply.

Again the name was called, and questions asked from whence it was clear he was in the mine, was not known to be dead, but was missing, leaving no traces behind.

'Sullivan,' said the Deputy, 'be it your task as soon as this roll-call is over to hunt him up. Take

one or two others with you, and matches ; but find him I conjure you ! Find him, I say !’

‘I will, sir ! By the Lord, I will if there be anything of him left.’

The roll-call went on :—

‘Hugh Williams !’

‘Dead !’ cried a smothered voice after a pause.

‘Died he well ?’ demanded the Deputy.

Again there was a pause, and then the words were heard dropping with difficulty—

‘Ask no more ! He died.’

‘John Law !’

There was no reply.

‘He was here and living an hour ago, and sharing heartily in praise and prayer,’ said a quavering, melancholy voice.

‘John Law !’ again cried David, and more loudly.

‘That man’s hiding,’ whispered another voice to David. ‘He has lost heart again, and wants to make away with himself, if only he can find the will to do it, when we mayn’t know.’

‘John Law !’ then called out the Deputy, ‘in Christ’s name I bid thee answer if that thou livest !’

Canst thou lie, even by silence, to Him? Come forth, John Law!’

‘Let me alone, can’t you?’ was the sullen reply of John Law when he found he could no longer be silent. ‘A pretty set to be among where a man can’t even die as he likes, and in quiet, after making his peace with God!’ These last words were spoken in a strangely troubled, hesitating, unpeaceful kind of words and manner.

‘Made your peace with God! You have done that! The very man then we sorely need and covet. Come forth,’ cried the Deputy, ‘and teach us too that most precious of all earthly lessons—peace with God—which ever means peace also with our own souls, ay, peace and joy!’

He came, and all made way for him till he reached the Deputy and David.

The Deputy took his reluctant hand as he said—

‘Thou knowest I have little strength and much call upon it. All must help. Thy task must be to keep the dead-register day by day. Write down then the date of the day, and begin with the words “OUR DEAD,” and the name of Hugh Williams. I

should fear to give this task to most who are here, but thou, I know well, wilt be faithful to the record and keep it truly. Begin ! ’

Something in the morbid nature of the man akin to his task, and something of force in the idea of having work of any kind to do in such a place however dreadful, caused the man to accept his duty, and at once begin—first, to fulfil the directions given, then to listen for what additions, if any, might have to be made.

By the time the roll had been gone through and perfected by the addition of the ten explorers, it was found to contain thirty-two names ; but out of these John Law’s death-list included no less than seven unfortunates.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CREATING A SOUL UNDER THE RIBS OF DEATH.

THE roll-call over, the Deputy invited all to join with him in a solemn religious service, and to decide that they would hold such services at least thrice a day.

They should be short, he said, suited to their physical weakness, but earnest and life-giving, to accord with their great spiritual need.

So the voices of prayer and supplication rose, and in such tones as no ordinary church or chapel-goers can even conceive of, so passionate and intense was their character.

Then, too, was heard the voice, which is ordinarily one of admonition in the form of a sermon. But the Deputy's heart was too wise for that now. He knew well that it was communion—comfort—and not preaching the hearers needed. They

were staggering on the edge of a world that seemed fast slipping from under their feet ; and the Deputy's task was to make them feel not only that such a world might go, and yet they not be lost, but to show them that the other world—the one full of such inconceivable happiness and glory—could only be reached by them—and not by them only, the sad victims of calamity—but by all, however rich, thriving, and comfortable, in the same way, by the exact same kind of sacrifice. Between the poor miners here, and the kindest hearts outside, now sympathising with their condition, the fate so much dreaded was only a question of a little more or less of time, while the thing to be gained was a question of eternity.

And lastly, swelled out the rough, and for the most part, untutored voices, with a hymn and a melody, that, however discordant to an earthly musician, was as the voices of seraphs to the Deputy's ravished ear. They sang one of the simplest and most child-like of hymns, one that had nourished the boyhood of many a listener, and which had never seemed half so sweet, soothing, and precious as now.

‘Ah! my brethren,’ murmured the Deputy, with streaming eyes, at the close, ‘ask now of yourselves, ask of your own hearts, whether there is not comfort in this; and whether there could be any enemy more deadly than he who should shake your faith, lessen your fervour, and carry you back to the old chaotic, selfish state from which we are escaping. Hold fast, then, the good you have; and if the other good we seek, wish for, yearn for—why should we deny it?—if life here, and the nobler life beyond are both to be ours, how great will be our consolation to be able to look back upon these hours and see how manfully we bore ourselves through them! So that every way we gain by our faith in God, by our love for one another. If now we die, we die prepared. If we live, we live to know how much better life can be made, and so again become still more worthy of our ultimate reception into the bosom of God.

‘Let us then resolve to have but this one law of brotherhood or love; love to guide us through every hour, every pang, every effort, every mood of despair, for such moods will come.

‘To work, then, dear brethren. Weak as we are in our frames, and weaker as we may expect them to become, there is wonderful power in the spirit that wills, and in the spirit that believes, to control the frame that cannot will or believe. Faintness, hunger, disease—all these things we must expect—all these we must fight with; but take courage—feel you can be master, and master you will be. Let ours be the faith that can remove mountains, and mountains of doubt, depression, difficulty will be lifted from our heads.

‘My voice rebels against me, or there is much more I would say. My young friend here—David—to him I confide what my powers are insufficient for—the practical direction of affairs. There is much to be done. We must watch hourly the rise or fall of the water, and mark thrice a day the highest line, so that we may not deceive ourselves as to the truth.

‘We must institute an unbroken series of signals in the places where those who may try to succour us will be most likely to hear them.

‘We must try to open new communications. It is a vital matter that all possible skill and energy should be directed to reaching our food—and

light. Both are near, and it is quite possible that in a few hours both may be in our possession. There is even a thought in my mind, which I dared not before tell you, but that now I will, in the belief that you will not let it unduly influence you. I think, then, that Israel Mort will spare no pains to get at us ; his plans of the mine are perfect ; he must know where we are if we live, and which would be the shortest way to reach us from the surface, without passing through the waters that occupy the lower parts of the mine.'

He paused, for this new thought, which had been vaguely growing in many minds, and now first found expression, raised new tumults of hope, and agitation, and distress.

'Yes, brethren,' he went on, 'these things are so, and being so, impose new duties upon us. The first duty is obedience. I ask you to obey him, my friend, my almost son. He is skilful, devoted to you, and if all that you already know of him is not enough, let me then tell you this—behold in him, my brethren, David Mort, the boy who left his home rather than be forced into the mine ! He it is who now shares your fate so bravely, and earnestly covets from God the wondrous and un-

speaking privilege of helping you out of this fearful strait if that be possible.'

A feeble and yet enthusiastic shout succeeded to the first emotion of surprise among the miners at the news thus made known to them. And then from more than one voice rose the cry—

'Does Israel, does his father know?'

'I deeply regret to say he does not. But we will deliver him up to that father, will we not, safe and sound?'

'Ay, that we will, if God only lets us,' warmly responded.

'You well remind me of what I had forgotten for the moment;—ay, if only God lets us. Teach me, dear brethren, always thus. Only make me not too proud to be so taught. And now sing me another hymn; inexpressible is the comfort your mingled voices give me. That which the eye cannot see the ear can hear. Come!' And so saying he himself began with the first two lines of a verse, which he slightly altered for the occasion—

Out of the depths to Thee we cry.
Our voice, Lord, do Thou hear!

but he could go no further, so shut his eyes, and listened in a kind of divine ecstasy to the rest.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE.

THE Deputy's strength was now so completely prostrated, that he could only lie in the corner where David's loving hands had managed to make for him a not uncomfortable bed; and there receive from time to time reports of everything done or attempted, and of the actual state of the air, water, &c., of the mine.

It was wonderful what new strength this very weakness of the Deputy infused into David's soul. The appeal to him seemed so irresistible that he could not think so ill of himself as to believe it possible he could be deaf to it—or that there could be any other conceivable course open than that he should strive humbly to do all Rees Thomas would have done, and that he should strive to do it in something of Rees Thomas' spirit.

Leaving to the men appointed their various tasks, he addressed himself to the question of how best the stables and store-places already spoken of might be reached.

There was not an hour to be lost. The people in the mine were already greatly enfeebled. Let more time elapse, and they would scarcely be able to lift a hand, even with the chances of salvation open before them.

Taking with him the man who had lighted the match in so desperate a mood—as if prepared to blow them all up and have done with the struggle, but who since then had followed him about with the mute fidelity of a dog, content to do anything he was bidden to do, and seeking no reward beyond a word or two of mental patting on the head—David led the way to a distant level, which presently began to slope downwards.

‘Take care,’ said David, ‘the ground is slippery, and the water’s here.’

They moved on with careful steps, till they touched with their feet the black depths that gleamed beneath the light of the collier’s lamp.

‘Now Elliott,’ said David, ‘I want to consult

with you about this. Hold the lamp as far out as you can over the water, and look in !’

Elliott did as he was told. They were at this moment standing in a gallery scarcely five feet wide, and less than four feet high, sloping down into the water. Elliott looked long and earnestly, then with a sigh turned and said,

‘ Ah, Master David, it’s a hopeless job, if you mean that the food lies beyond this, and can only be obtained by going through it.’

‘ Why?’

‘ Because the water’s up to the roof, only a few yards off.’

‘ Yes, I suppose so. But do you think it impossible for a man to wade and dive through to the other side?’

‘ Oh, Master—the job’s too fearful ! Think on it ; no possibility of rising to the top for a mouthful of air if you need it ever so bad ; and perhaps further to go than the strongest swimmer could manage, even if he knew the blue sky was above him, should he suddenly feel he must have a look at it.’

‘ Yes, I have thought just the same. But some-

how fear itself begets a kind of courage, and I want to know which is best—lie here in safety, such as it is, and die for want of food ; or risk our not very valuable lives, under present circumstances, and perhaps succeed in saving every man in the mine.’

‘ Ah, Master David, what’s the use of deceiving ourselves? I can see you know well enough that no power on earth can open a way for us through the water that lies betwixt us and the shaft for many a day, perhaps for many a week to come. Ah, Master David, we shall all be stiff and stark afore that happens ! ’

‘ Suppose my father knows where we are in this high district. Suppose he knows of the probability we may have air. Suppose he knows a short way to us, that he may open before many days. Suppose he knows that we can only want food, and that that is obtainable if only we have manly courage enough to seek it, through this dip. Suppose all that—and what then? ’

‘ Why then, Master, I’m willing to do as you do—stake life agin life with you—and hope for the best.’

‘ Ah, Elliott, I knew what you’d say ! I knew my man, you see, when I chose you. Come, then. Let us to work. Here, help me to uncoil this rope.’

David had wound round his waist a piece of rope, light, but strong. This was taken off carefully, so as not to get entangled.

‘ Now,’ said David, ‘ my plan is to tie this rope about one of us, while the other holds the end, and pays it out carefully, inch by inch, never letting it slacken ; so that the man who is in the water may be drawn back at the first sign that he is stopped by some obstacle, or unable from any cause to advance further. If two distinctly separate pulls be given, let that be a signal to wait. Two more implies going on as before. You understand ? ’

‘ Ay, ay, Master David, it’s plain enough.’

‘ Well, now, take your choice which shall go first. I quite expect we may have to try and try again before getting through.’

‘ Let’s toss for it, Master David ! ’

‘ No, say which you like, and let’s begin.’

‘ Fair play, Master David, ’s a jewel, that shines

even in such infernal darkness as we've gotten here. Let's have fair play.'

'Why haven't I offered you fair play—and more?'

'Ay, that's the mischief—"fair play and more;" I don't think you should expect me to go first, and I certainly shan't let you go first, so as to reflect on me.'

'Oh, well, you're a strange, inconsistent fellow, Elliott, but let it be as you like.'

The collier took a coin from his pocket, and placed it on the palm of one hand while covering it with the other, and looked enquiringly at David as he said,

'If you guess right, I go first. If wrong, you go first.'

'Do you mind reversing it? Instead of making the task a penalty, let it be one of honour and privilege. If I am wrong in my guess, let me lose the right to begin.'

'So be it,' said Elliott with a dry laugh.

'They shall say of us we were loyal to the last,' exclaimed David with something between a

laugh and a sigh, 'so I pronounce it is the Queen's head that you so affectionately protect.'

Elliott lifted his hand, and both the men looked eagerly. David's guess had failed.

Elliott looked half savagely at him for a moment, as if suspecting some devilry, but recollecting himself, said,

'All right! I'm ready!'

While the rope was being fastened, David gave Elliott the benefit of his thoughts.

'Be very careful not to confuse yourself with the sides of the level, or before you know what you're about you'll be butting against one of them, and thinking you're trying to go ahead against impossibilities.'

Elliott listened, and took in the advice thoroughly. And then David added—

'Mind, there is at some part of this dip, as I myself well remember, an opening; a place where the roof suddenly expands and gets higher. That space must have air. It may be that you may reach that before you reach a spot on the ascending slope of the dip, where there will be air once more, between the water and the roof.'

‘And how, in God’s name, am I to know when I get to that hollow place in the roof, if I do get there? Am I to keep bobbing my head against the roof all the way to find it?’

David sighed as he answered—

‘I cannot answer you. I tell you all I know.’

‘Well, Master David, good-bye!’

‘Good-bye! I’ll look sharp after you, trust me.’ responded David.

The man went in, moving slowly, feeling now this side, now that, now the roof, till he could scarcely any longer be seen.

David nervously kept the rope at full stretch, and thus was conscious of a sudden stop.

Then there was a violent pull, and two or three yards of the rope were drawn out. David understood. The man had gone as far as he could by wading, then plunged into the water. Some moments of fearful suspense followed. The rope flickered as it were with a series of fitful pulls, but no more was drawn out; then it sensibly slackened and became still.

In half a minute more the almost senseless form was being dragged up the slope by David out

of the water, and brandy being administered to the cold but quivering lips.

Elliott soon revived. His story briefly was that he found on diving nothing but obstruction whichever way he moved, till he knew no more.

Yes, that which David had warned him against had happened. He had lost consciousness of the straight line between the sides of the gallery, had turned partially round and become hopelessly confused.

David waited only till he saw Elliott was able to take charge of the end of the rope. A kind of frenzy for speed seemed to possess him, that took away his faculties. He felt for a moment as if he must go to swift destruction, were it only through his incapacity to guide himself rightly and clearly through the undertaking.

But the chill of the water seemed to bring back concentration of purpose ; and then, as though the darkness of the awful place were suddenly illumined by some glorious light, there came a thought of his father, a thought of Nest, a thought that this terrible way was after all *the way to them* : and from that moment the worst was passed.

He took care to go to the very farthest possible point where air remained betwixt the water and the roof, before letting his face be covered.

Then taking as deep an inspiration of breath as he could, he strode on, not attempting to swim, but moving swiftly, feeling sides and roof, restraining emotion, assuring himself every instant he could yet hold out without suffocation—that the space in the roof would soon be reached.

But his feet got unsteady, his hands began to be aimless; he felt that if his next, his last effort to reach the goal should prove a failure, he must turn and be drawn back—perhaps in death.

When he could bear no more, convulsively he lifted both his hands. Nothing opposed them. He stood up erect. He was able to breathe again. Then feeling a tug at the rope, he remembered his signal, and gave two pulls and rested.

A few seconds were thus spent: and with so much of relief that David guessed there must be some aperture for the entrance of air from a more open part of the mine. He felt for it, found it, and discovered there was an opening of some

size, perhaps large enough for him to get through.

He felt hollows in the wall or side, which had doubtless been used before to climb by. By these he ascended, got through the hole, lighted his lamp by a match, both of which he had carefully packed in oil-cloth obtained from a miner's ragged waterproof, and then found himself master of all he had so much coveted ; within a hundred and fifty yards of him were, as he well knew, the store-houses and the stables.

He removed the rope from his waist, and made it fast by tying it to a stick he found, and which he so placed across the hole on the side away from the water that it could not be drawn through by Elliott, should he get alarmed about the long delay.

His first objects of search were for things that could be used as food. He found one horse still living, though lying half senseless on the litter. David did not hesitate a moment to play the butcher with a sharp clasp-knife, and put the poor creature out of its misery, while leaving it as a precious article of food. A large quantity of

candles was in the store. Oil in abundance, also, David found. So there was that which would serve as food for all for many days, and also give light for all when light might be indispensable.

As he began to return, his ear caught the sound of trickling water. Eagerly he sought for it. And delightedly he drank. He wondered as to the origin of the water in the dip. It certainly had nothing to do with the inundation. And the water itself, by its comparative purity, showed the same. Surely there must be a vent from the dip, which had accidentally got stopped up. Imagine the power of such a thought at such a moment, suggesting as it did he might not again be obliged, cold and wet as he was, to retrace that dreadful way. To his unspeakable delight, alike as regarded himself and the little band of fellow-captives, he found the orifice, pulled out through the ooze one rag after another, till at last great part of a collier's jacket came away, and was followed by a rush of water, the noise of which seemed to David the very sweetest music it had ever been his fortune to listen to.

He thought now he would not attempt to go

back till he could do so without danger or difficulty ; so he roamed about arranging how he would bring all the men to this new place ; where they should sit in their hours of rest, and lie when they slept ; how they might best use their food, much of it so unpalatable ; whether a fire were possible for cooking, and so on.

While he was thus luxuriating in the new domain he had conquered, he heard a voice so close to his ear, and so appalling in its suddenness and unexpectedness, that he screamed out ; then saw it was Elliott, tried to laugh off his fright, but was obliged to sit down and be silent awhile before he could recover from the shock his whole system had received.

Elliott meanwhile explained how he had seen the water moving away, had guessed what David had done, had fastened his end of the rope, and guided by that had followed the water right to the hole where the rope ended, and where he knew David must have passed through.

How David hurried back with the news, how the whole available strength and skill of the buried captives was used to take every man in

safety through the water, some requiring to be carried the whole way to the new quarters, need not be enlarged upon.

The change came just in time to save many, and among them the Deputy.

They were all now ill, weak, more or less desponding, but they had food, air, light as much as they dared to enjoy, knowing that every drop of oil burned to waste might mean in the end death brought an hour nearer to them, when the only hope was to hold out till relief came, if relief were possible.

CHAPTER XXV.

DAVID'S VOW.

No more sad or fearful picture ever entered the mind of poet or painter than that which was presented when first oil became sufficiently plentiful among them for all to be able to supply their lamps; and when at the invitation of David, who thought the incident would do good both for the moment and afterwards when reflected on, they all lighted them, and thus were enabled after so many days to see each other's faces in their new place of shelter.

David, on the plea of economy and with an attempt to be jocular, instantly caused all the lamps but one—his own—to be put out again; but confessed afterwards to the Deputy his motive, that he had been shocked at his own thoughtlessness, when he saw how ghastly were the faces and forms presented.

When all had been done that the Deputy and David had thought of any use; when all the available stores of the mine had been garnered up, and were fast being used; when it became clear that weeks might yet elapse before Israel and his helpers could descend through the bottom of the shaft and extricate them, so slowly did the waters subside; when there was no longer hope of the Deputy's idea being realised of their opening out a communication with the surface that should evade the water; when even the 'morning,' afternoon,' and 'nightly' services—so called, though night might be day and day night for aught they knew—began to fail of their first inspiring effect, and chiefly through the Deputy's physical exhaustion;—when all these influences together began to press upon the unhappy miners, they seemed to abandon hope—to turn vengefully against even a suggestion inclining that way, and then was for the Deputy and David, too, as for the rest, what seemed the darkest hours.

So he and they thought. But they were mistaken. A startling incident occurred that roused the prostrate community from their death-like

sleep and torpor, as effectually as if they had then heard the trumpet of the archangel at the last day calling them in common with the dead from their graves.

And yet the sound heard was perhaps the very faintest, feeblest that man ever listened to while his heart beat tumultuously and his soul cried out to him, 'It is the voice of fate!'

David was lying alone on a slope, wondering whether Nest had any suspicion of his being there. Was she thinking he had played her a trick, unworthy perhaps, not altogether truthful, but which she might consider done in the purest spirit of self-sacrificing love. The letter he had written to her, and which the reader has seen, nowhere distinctly said he was not going down. If she noticed that fact, he feared she would refuse to believe he was still busy in the upper world. If, when the inundation became known, she had had any suspicion of his being in the mine, she would have gone to Israel; and in her alarm perhaps let him guess or discover who the agent from London was; but as Israel himself knew nothing of his presence in the pit, Nest, of

course, would go away relieved as to her fears for him.

This was the theme he was turning over, not once, but many times, languidly in his thoughts (for energy of any kind was no longer possible), trying to satisfy himself there was no mistake, and that, whatever his ultimate destiny, Nest would be spared at least the intolerable torture of suspense.

But somehow he was in a condition when suggestions of comfort of any kind seemed to be a poison, and poison of the most disgusting kind, and therefore to be unhesitatingly rejected.

Then if she did know or suspect he was in the mine, what would she do?

‘Raise heaven and earth in his behalf if that were possible,’ said David to himself, with a half-smile, but one which was wholly of intense bitterness.

For what could she do? Nothing! Nothing where Israel, his father, saw no way to relief.

At that moment he felt as if a kind of supernatural, impalpable bullet had been fired right

into his brain, and had electrified every nerve and muscle of his body.

It was a mere thought—the thought that at that instant of time he had heard the faintest echo of a tap. It seemed too delicate, too ethereal to be the tap itself, but was like its echo. Putting one hand to his forehead to quell the rising tumult there, he partly raised himself to a sitting posture with the other, and listened as a prisoner in the dock on a capital charge might listen, the moment before the foreman of the jury opened his lips to deliver his verdict.

He sat—rigid, immovable—for, perhaps, five minutes.

What awful minutes they were! each being interrogated as it passed, and each mutely passing on.

No repetition, no confirmation of the supposed sound came.

Suddenly, with a cry of anger at his own folly, he turned, and prostrated himself at full length, with his brow tightly pressed against the ground.

There, too, he stayed motionless, for a time—perhaps a couple of minutes.

Then he raised his head, with a passionate, broken ejaculation :

‘ O Father of mercies, wouldst Thou deceive ? ’
and again he bowed his head for another minute.

Then he almost sprang to his feet, and paced to and fro.

‘ If I make any mistake, how am I to bear the truth afterwards ?

‘ If I tell them what I believe, and the event proves me a liar, will they not call me their worse than murderer, and say I have killed their souls ?

‘ O God, Thou wilt not mistake me if I do not now throw myself at Thy feet in a transport of gratitude and love, for the question is of Thy will, and what is Thy will with us all just now. But if this truly be Thy will, that Thou dost confirm what all my senses tell me that I heard but now, not once but thrice—measured blows—at equal and slow intervals of time—not in the least like the miner’s blow when at work ; if this be true, and we be saved, I here, in these dreadful deeps,

vow to Thee to dedicate my whole future life, my knowledge gained or to gain, my skill, such as Thou hast given—in a word, the utmost effort of my whole being, to the helpless miners' cause ; in the hope and assured belief that these calamities may absolutely be prevented, and the life of the miner made more worthy of Thee and of the infinite faculties Thou hast given him. Amen !'

Then once more he stooped to listen for several minutes. When he rose he was calm and collected, and went away to seek the Deputy and three or four of the miners, who could best be trusted with the supposed or real discovery.

They came, and one and all, in transports of joy, confirmed the fact that deliverers were near.

They would have replied—did, indeed, make feeble efforts that way, till, satisfied that David spoke correctly when he said that it was perfectly useless, unless they could get a strong unenfeebled arm to handle the pick, and to strike with ; whereas their strength was as a child's. Then, the sound passing outwards, he showed them, would be lost in the larger and more open space ; while the sound passing in struck on a confined and bell-like

space, that gave the greatest effect to the stroke, which yet they could only just hear.

He warned them, too, that there must be a dense mass of rock or coal between them and the party who were working for their relief, to cause the sound to be so low.

This incident infused new life into the Deputy's attenuated and trembling frame. But his use of the recovery was again to summon heavenwards the wandering thoughts and hopes and desires of the captive men. He demanded that they should be prepared at all hazards for either fate. He would listen to no assurances of speedy relief; for, if he believed, he gained nothing but a temporary and perhaps illusive comfort. He was compelled to point out to them, that as their knocking could not be heard, the conclusion, sooner or later, might be that they were all dead, and further efforts useless. He did not also say—what, however, he could not but think—how vitally Israel Mort's pecuniary position must press upon him, and influence him to stop the moment he could feel justified.

On the whole Rees Thomas refused either to

believe or disbelieve, but was resolved as a Christian hero to wait till he knew the truth.

How long this knocking might have gone on no one could even guess. Of course every step nearer the deliverers made, the clearer and louder the knocking would become.

And so it proved hour by hour

It was then resolved that all the men should be taken into counsel, if only to stimulate their flagging vital powers, so that they might live till relief came.

Boundless was the hope, the confidence, of the men ; marvellous the effect in newly inspiring them ; fervid, indeed, the ensuing religious services, mixed, however, with an element of restless and agitating tumult, that hurt the Deputy till he found the reason :—

They wanted to be at the signal place, congregated together as near as they could get, to listen to the advance of the deliverers. It was as a dram to them, which they could not now live without.

And there they sat, hour by hour, and day by day, unwilling to move, except for the most positive necessities, and immediately returning to listen

to the music that thrilled through and possessed their whole souls—the measured strokes, yet far distant, of the friendly pick.

How dreadful to have to speak of their disenchantment!—of that fearful moment when on the fifth day of their captivity the accustomed tap was missed—when the excited watchers cried to each other: ‘Oh, it is but a temporary accident!’ and summoned all to be quiet.

They listened as men listen for the renewed beats of the heart of one dead, yet supposed still to be living,—their alarm, distress, agony, rising minute by minute.

And still time passed on, and there was no sign.

And when one, two, three days passed, and the pick was still unheard, then there was a general giving way; and men bent low their heads, and felt their hearts broken, as they waited only now for the signals of that other deliverer—Death!

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHY THE SIGNALS STOPPED.

‘FOR me it never rains but it pours,’ said Israel, when the news of the inundation reached him; and that was his only verbal comment; but he set his teeth hard, and felt the fight betwixt himself and fate was now at its climax.

And with that thought, and the feeling that all men and all things were against him, his old stony hardness of spirit seemed to come back to him, and with that came all the old thirst to succeed—no matter at what cost, or through what obstacles.

So far as prudence and humanity went together, Israel was content to give full swing to the latter quality. So he set to work to get the mine emptied of the water as fast as possible, for that helped both aims.

But it was soon found that the pumps made no

way against the inundation. Higher and higher rose the water in the shaft, till Israel knew that all the lower parts of the mine were submerged, including the district where the explorers had been at work at the time of the occurrence of the newer and more dreadful calamity.

He said to every one from that time he was sure that not a living soul existed in the mine. Eight days had passed ; no life could exist there so long. And there can be no doubt he persuaded himself so strongly into that belief as to give it a kind of honesty.

Were it but for Rees Thomas's sake alone, however, he felt bound for some time to persevere with operations evidently directed to save the unfortunates below, if any really lived.

But at the same time, for his own sake, and to satisfy his creditors, and those from whom he hoped for aid, he went on with increased vigour, and new and more powerful appliances, to redeem the mine from the water ; expecting thus also to help to satisfy the popular craving for vigorous action.

But the craving was not to be stilled so easily.

The cry rose, and grew louder every day and every hour, that the people inside would have got to the high levels, would live there in the constant hope of being relieved, and that they ought to be relieved—they could be, they must be relieved, and some almost ventured to threaten Israel they should be relieved.

Many among the more clamorous of the colliers insisted that if Israel Mort chose he could open a route without encountering the waters of the inundation, by which to reach those higher parts where the living men would be surely found.

They also pointed out that those very parts were in close neighbourhood at one point to the stables, and to the store-places for oil and candles, so that they might get abundance of food, which, however unsuitable, would still preserve life.

While Israel appeared still obdurate, news was brought to him that a meeting was to take place at one of the neighbouring chapels, where Rees Thomas often preached, and where friends of his would be present, to show how cruel, nay, how criminal, was his—Mort's—conduct ; and to pro-

pose that a public and influential deputation should confront him at the mine.

Israel was shaken a little by this. His pecuniary position was so bad, and getting altogether so hopeless unless he could have the mine again at work, that to ask him to give money for experimentally humane purposes, was like asking him to give his blood, that he might die, and somebody else be nourished by it.

But he was shaken, where otherwise he would have been firm as adamant, by the thought of the Deputy ; who had gone down for him, and in a spirit of so exalted a kind, that even Israel, stern as he seemed alike in exterior and heart, felt he could almost kneel down and worship him.

And when that first emotion died out, finding the soil so uncongenial, still he was haunted by thoughts of Rees Thomas that kept him in perpetual discomfort and self-war, and would not be driven off by Israel's old-world philosophy.

The fact was, he loved the man better, perhaps, than he loved any other human being (the missing David being for the time out of the

question), though the love might not amount to much, after all.

Still, when he found himself pressed upon at once by the half-maddened people who had relatives in the mine, and by his own conscience, he, after a terrible struggle at the prospect of utter ruin which this new effort and expense seemed to make more certain, gave orders on the eleventh day to proceed in the way desired.

Israel's plans showed two things: first, a ground-plan, by which he was able to tell the precise districts where alone safety could have been found; and, secondly, a vertical section, which told him the exact depth and degree of inclination that would be required to open a route, from a spot not far distant in an old mine which was readily accessible, to the supposed places of refuge.

The works were begun, and continued with seeming vigour: though there were many sharp critics who noticed how much more anxious Israel Mort was to get down into the mine the natural way—by getting rid of the water—than

to reach the interior by the new route, which ought to occupy but a short time to make.

Israel was wise in his generation; and knew well that even as regards pecuniary matters he could not afford to lose the good feeling of the neighbourhood; so he skilfully managed to do just so much as relieved him from any danger on that score, and resolutely refused in his own mind to go one jot beyond.

Signals—those heard by the imprisoned men—were kept up with extreme exactitude; and it must be owned, in simple justice to Israel, that if he had but received a reply at any time, or the slightest indication of the men being alive, he would have thrown selfish prudence to the wind; and have worked with might and main, and in the most generous spirit, in the hope to relieve the Deputy and his companions.

But he felt it hard to squander his little means in pursuit of an object that he was sure was impossible of attainment.

Then, too, a creditor interposed, and asked Israel if he knew whose money he was expending on these absurd attempts; and threatened, if

they were not discontinued, he would find a way to stop more than those particular works.

Israel listened, said nothing, and went on, but not for long.

He saw at last what he had waited for—conviction beginning to dawn upon the faces of the people who were hanging about the pit mouth, that all was over with the imprisoned men. Then, when just a fortnight had elapsed, he suddenly abandoned the works ; and—characteristically—so destroyed what had been done by throwing back all the stuff that had been got out as to prevent any new cry being raised for their continued progress.

Then it was that the unhappy men inside noted the cessation of the signals, and saw they were finally abandoned.

There were no more complaints outside of Israel's conduct. No one reproached him—even in secret—except Israel's own self.

He suffered, he hardly knew why, intense anguish, as he saw all undone ; and felt some enemy drive in upon him the fancy—‘ What now, if the Deputy has been alive, after all, and hearing your

signals, and now has to digest as he may their silence?'

Israel would listen to no more of such absurd and sinister fancies. He rushed into work and scheming to see how, when the water was all out, he might enter with new hope of making the mine turn to profit.

And then it was that the sort of silent underground revolution of character that had been going on, however seemingly moveless, since his purchase of the mine from Griffith Williams, assumed a new and final phase, in a portentous discovery.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN ENEMY'S MESSAGE.

It was indeed a terrible revelation and retribution that awaited Israel Mort when he was summoned that night by Griffith Williams to come instantly to the Farm, on a matter of life and death that brooked no delay.

He was thunderstruck. What ! his old enemy—the man who had contributed by incessant litigation most seriously to cripple him in money matters—he send for him, and by a summons that seemed as if it was thought impossible that it could be challenged !

What could it mean ? David ? Did they know aught of him ? He was not in the mine ! No ; and, before he knew what he was doing, Israel thanked God with more than a father's natural fervour and gratitude that calamities of that nature at least were spared him.

Then, as he mused awhile whether he would or would not go, he saw all quite clear. Yes, that Mr. Knight—the young fellow he had felt so strongly drawn to—had won Nest's affections; and she had perhaps become alarmed at his not keeping an appointment, and fancied he was down in the mine, knowing probably what Israel himself knew, that he had intended to lead the explorers, till another mining engineer had offered, and simultaneously Mr. Knight had been recalled to London. Well, he was glad he could relieve Nest on that score.

So thinking, he reached the Farm; where, advancing to meet him, he saw Mr. Griffith Williams, who put out his hand in deep emotion as he said—

‘Israel, there are physical calamities so fearful that even wild beasts and those they prey on come together, and are for the moment, if not friends, certainly not enemies. As Christian men, cannot we somewhat improve upon this lesson, before I tell you that which must now be told?’

‘Is—it—so—serious?’ asked Israel, agitated, but controlling his agitation to the utmost of his

power, and speaking for that purpose with more than his usual deliberation.

‘Think the worst, and you will fall short of the truth.’

‘What do you wish me to do?’ asked Israel.

‘To forgive, before God and man, aught I may have done amiss to you, as I, before the same dread witnesses, forgive any wrong you may have done or meditated towards me.’

Israel, still cautious, seemed to weigh in his thought Griffith's every word, as if to be quite sure there lurked no after mischief; and, being satisfied of that, held out his hand, saying—

‘On my soul, I accept that which you offer, and as you offer it.’

Then he paused, half turning away, as if the better to listen to what he was to hear, but which he did not attempt in any way to anticipate.

‘Come in-doors,’ said Griffith; and they both went in to that same light and cheerful room where Israel first made the squire's personal acquaintance, but which was now ominously darkened. ‘Nest is there on the sofa. Strange to say, after being delirious for days and nights

together, now that you come, whom she so pined to see, she has just sunk to sleep, which under any other circumstance might yet lead to her recovery.'

'And these circumstances——?' said Israel in a voice harsher than Griffith had ever heard it—through the dryness of his throat, and a kind of terror that began to oppress him.

'Israel, it must be God's hand that has thus brought us together by links that neither of us can resist. Nest loves your son. They are devoted to each other. I knew nothing of it till quite recently, but it seems both our wives encouraged them in it, and now——' he stopped, as if unable or unwilling to proceed.

'And now you wish me to understand how far below her and you my son must be.'

'In heaven's name, Israel, be silent till you know more of that of which you speak. I thought you would understand, would guess——'

'Guess! What! Is David dead?'

'He is in the mine!'

'Madman! Unsay that, or I will choke the lie out of your very throat!' Then, as he saw the anguish in Griffith's face, he seemed to feel the

hour of retribution had come, and in the most fearful of shapes.

What! Could it be possible that David had heard those signals, had lived upon them for days—when nothing else would have kept him alive—and then had found them stop—stop by his, Israel's, command—leaving him, to the wonder and execration of posterity, as the murderer of his own son?

He stayed no further questions than sufficed to make clear, beyond possibility of doubt, that David was Mr. Knight, that he had gone down into the mine, and that Nest had only learned the fact three or four days ago, and gone out instantly as if to seek Israel or to go to the mine, but been brought back delirious by a crowd of women, from the pit-mouth.

Mr. Williams finished by saying that it was only to-day she had recovered so as to be able to make known the frightful truth.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ONCE MORE, DEAR FRIENDS, ONCE MORE !

HALF way between the Farm and the mine, Israel met the creditor who has been already mentioned, a Mr. Ingram, who had discounted bills for him. He was about to pass him by, not simply without stopping to speak, but as if he were altogether unconscious of his existence. But Mr. Ingram met him point-blank, and noticing the discourtesy, said roughly,

‘That bill’s due on Wednesday. Are you ready to meet it?’

‘No. It must be renewed. I cannot stop now. I must re-open that new route into the mine! They tell me my son is within!’

‘I don’t believe a word of it. And if he be, he must be dead, like the rest, as you know well.’

‘ I will see to that.’

‘ Mr. Mort, in one word, I positively forbid any further operations of that kind. You have owned there was no chance several days ago ; others have said the same, and I look upon this as a mere subterfuge, intended for I know not what sinister purpose, except it be to squander other people’s money, and leave your debts unpaid.’

Israel looked at him, and for a moment Mr. Ingram’s eye quailed under the intensity and contempt of that gaze. But when he saw Israel meant to pass away without further speech, he said,

‘ Choose, Mr. Mort. Let this matter alone, or if you do not, I’ll arrest you, I will, by God, if you dishonour the bill!’

Israel deigned no answer, but went his way.

That way was straight to the mine. There he stopped the pumps, and set every man at work to re-open the very ground he had deliberately closed.

When they had again reached the farthest point of their previous operations he began to form three distinct channels of communication leading

to as many different part of the district where alone refuge was possible.

He gave no reasons. He answered no questions, except he so answered them as to silence the questioners with fear of him. He neither sat down, nor slept, nor ate from that hour for days ; but pressed on the labourers cruelly, and if they resisted vindictively ; seeing nothing ever before him but that fearful mass of solid rock or coal that had to be pierced through, beyond the point reached before and beyond which was David, only David, for he forgot even the Deputy now, as well as all the other buried men.

The collier at the head of each party worked on with fierce effort, ceaselessly spurred by Israel's cry of—‘ Now then ! Now ! ’ till exhausted, when he gave place to another.

The coal had all to be carried away in hand-baskets by a chain of men who reached from the actual hewers to a place where others removed it to the surface.

Once when a man in this chain caused a temporary delay in the transit of the basket, Israel struck him passionately with a stick ; but the

man made no sign of offence, and went on ; for he knew now what all were beginning to know, who was inside, and what was Israel's position.

The want of air—not simply fresh air, but any air—was a fearful obstacle as they advanced their narrow channels—narrow because they dared not take up time by making them an inch larger than was necessary. The workmen were compelled to stop at last, while ventilators were put up ; and those who saw Israel at that time were ever after accustomed to say, that anything more fearful—demoniacal—than Israel's face, they had never seen in life or in pictures.

And when the ventilators were at work the air at times was so bad that the lamps would only burn when kept in the line of the air-pipe, and very near.

Then as if to test Israel's powers of sanity and endurance to the utmost, the coal was found to get harder as they advanced, so that the effect of each stroke was pitiably small.

But at last, on the seventeenth day, and the third of their renewed effort, in which time work had been accomplished that would have required

a month even with the best and best-paid men under ordinary conditions the workers in one tunnel got fairly inside.

To find there solitude and silence, death and ruin.

They came first upon a part of a gnawed leather strap.

Then their steps were arrested by a group of four dead men, looking strangely placid, almost with a smile on their faces, their heads pillowed on their clothes : which were folded with such care and neatness as if the makers of the pillows were aware these would be the last they would ever make, and that from them they might hope to pass to the dearer pillow of Christ's breast.

Near this group of unfortunates, who had evidently not long been dead, and who seemed to have found consolation at the precise moment when they might have been expecting to suffer the last extremity of mortal pain, they picked up a candle-box, on which was inscribed by laborious indentation with an iron nail that lay close by, the words,

‘Dear mother, don’t fret, for I am singing the

praises of God!’ He had died before he could add his name.

Going on they found the list of

‘OUR DEAD,’

inscribed on the wall, with a date that showed it had been made only three days after Rees Thomas’ descent into the mine.

Israel glanced at this death-list for a single moment, then turned away again to proceed.

But the others with him stood reading the list with beating hearts—no man knowing whose name dear to him he might not find there.

The water-marks were next discovered—long, horizontal white lines of chalk, stretching across the blackness of the coal—placed day by day to mark the rise or fall of the water.

But the climax of discovery, of agitation, of deep distress and sympathy seemed to be reached, alike for Israel and all, when he and they came to

THE MINER’S PSALM.

and as they read by the imperfect light of their shaking lamps such sentences as these—

‘Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps.

‘Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and Thou hast afflicted me with all Thy waves.

‘I am shut up, and I cannot come forth.

‘Lover and friend hast Thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.’

Israel knew the handwritings, first the Deputy’s, then, as his strength perhaps failed, Mr. Knight’s, that is to say, David’s.

That was the first moment during these days that Israel gave any sign that he even belonged to our common human nature. Stern, impenetrable as the rugged icebergs of a Siberian winter till now, now he began to melt and show signs of manhood. He spoke gently; tears were seen for the first time in his eyes; and when some kindly spirit among the men brought him food, and begged for all their sakes he would eat, he sat down and ate, and was refreshed.

Perhaps he would have refused even this indulgence but that he saw their search had for the

moment ended. Every accessible spot had been explored, and not a trace found of the bulk of the imprisoned men. It was well, therefore, he should take a few minutes for thought and study of his map.

One glance of that sent him to his feet, as if roused by an electric shock.

He tracked mentally the captives' course from the first mount of safety, the shelving slope of their Ararat, through the closed up stall [where David had so bravely fired the gas] to the still higher levels beyond ; and he saw that if only they discovered the way through the dip, they might reach the best place of shelter the mine afforded, and where horse-flesh, oil, candles, were all obtainable.

Away he and his men went, through the very place David had discovered, and which was again foul with gas, that almost prostrated them as they crawled on hands and knees through it, away to the dip, which was once more full of water.

Had *they* found it shallow enough to pass through, Israel wanted to know. His wildest thoughts did not extend so far as to guess that

the party of wretched spectres could have gone under and through the water as it now was.

He did not even deem it worth while to try any schemes for him and his band to get through. It could only be attended by great hazard and infinite delays.

But he pointed out to his workmen a particular spot, and said—in the very spirit, and almost in the words of Henry V. to his soldiers at the siege of Harfleur—

“Once more, dear friends, unto the work! Once more!” I believe they are all there! Alive or dead they will surely be found there.’

But this, the eighteenth day, and the fourth of their severe labour, was one of almost intolerable suffering to the labourers. It frequently occurred that a man would go to the front as his turn came, and within two or three minutes pass to the rear utterly overcome.

Seeing this, and the loss of time it caused in passing and repassing by such narrow ways, which, however, fresh men behind continually enlarged Israel stopped work at the other two tunnels, which had still been going on, and drew his en-

tire strength of men together to the one that now was so full of promise.

Several times, hardly knowing why he did so, but most probably from the keen instincts of discipline and true leadership, Israel himself took up the pick, and continued for a time to work the vacated place.

No signals had been lately attempted, for there was no time. Every stroke, as it were swift or slow, might be saving or losing a life in the end. But on one of these occasions when Israel himself worked, before retiring to make way for a fresher man, he could not resist the temptation to call for deep silence, while he listened.

He knelt, then without looking round held up his hand behind him to check a whisper he heard.

He stooped lower, till his forehead touched the ground, then after half a minute or so he raised it a little, and put it against the face of the rock they were hewing away, and then again paused ; then he rose to his feet calmly, and said aloud,

‘Men, they are there! I hear them! They

live! I ask you to thank God for them and for me!’

A shout of ecstasy was his first answer. Then while the workers of the moment felt a new life in their veins, a new strength in their limbs, all the rest of the colliers knelt down, while one prayed aloud.

For hours the monotonous yet agitating toil went on thus. No more signals were needed, for the voices within were constantly heard, and generally as engaged in the singing of hymns, or pouring forth short heartfelt ejaculations.

Israel was tempted once to stop the workers that he might listen and try if he could distinguish the voice of David, the long-lost son, thus—and thus only—found again! But he checked himself as he remembered that success in that would lead to no good, and must involve delay.

About daybreak of the nineteenth day a sort of communication was established by means of a boring-rod through the last few feet of rock.

With upraised hand Israel motioned to all for silence.

They did not need the warning. Each man

was suspending his breath as he thought of the first question that was about to be put.

Israel stooped to the rod, put his lips to it, and asked, mastering as well as he could the trembling of his voice,

‘ Who have you there ? ’

‘ Father ! ’ was the reply, and in listening to it there was not a single collier who did not feel awe-stricken at the intensity and the significance of meaning of both voices.

Israel covered his face with his hands and wept aloud.

Strength, fortitude, life seemed almost about to ebb from him then. He staggered about like a drunken man, or rather like one who has just emerged from the utter darkness of a dungeon into a scene of surpassing sunlight and glory. Presently he dropped on the earth, and there awaited, supine, whatever else was to follow.

Slow, tedious, but not unhappy hours followed before the first figure came forth.

‘ Father ! ’ it cried, looking confusedly round, and being unable, from the cruel privations to which it had been subjected, to stand without help.

Israel heard, and moved to rise, but before he could do so David was kneeling at his feet, and murmuring—all the boy back again in his soul—

‘It was the mine, father, parted us, it is the mine that gives us back again to each other. I am no coward now, unless it is cowardice to be frightened at the imputation.’

‘How got you here?’ Israel murmured.

‘Through the water in the dip.’

‘Whilst full?’

‘Yes. And then I let out the water for the rest to pass.’

‘Oh, my boy! my boy! How I have wronged thee!’

And father and son lay there in the darkened corner of the mine, hand pressed in hand, breast to breast, and both heedless for some time of aught in the world but each other.

But happiness brought back to Israel a new and more vivid sense of his affection for the Deputy; and gave new pangs to his remorse as he reflected that it was he—Israel—who had condemned him to death, and would have abided by the condemnation but for the discovery that one

still nearer and dearer to him had to share the Deputy's fate ; and then he had found the way to save both, with all those of their fellows who remained alive.

One by one these were brought slowly forth ; some apparently dying, two dead, the rest in such a state that no man could venture to say whether life or death had the fastest hold upon them.

Last, characteristically last, as a matter of course, came the Deputy. Not till he saw his whole flock safely gathered together into a place of safety would he quit the place of his captivity.

He was brought forth by two men, quite unable to stand, scarcely able to speak.

But the smile that passed across his face, when he saw, by the lamp-light, David and Israel together, was one that would ever haunt both through their whole lives with the sense of its sweetness—its expressiveness, and which he could but feebly rival in his words :—

‘I lived but for this, and lo, it is accomplished. Now, O Lord, let me go to my eternal rest !’

‘Rees Thomas,’ murmured Israel, ‘I too am feeble, and hardly able to bear up under the gift that I owe, under God, to thee ; but——’

‘Under God ! dost thou say so ?’

Israel did not reply to that in words, but the grasp of the hand, and the look in Israel’s wonder-stricken eyes, told that the incident had done its work. Israel, the strong man, was changed, but would still be strong.

‘I was about to say to thee, Rees Thomas, if there be one thing in the world that David and I now need, it is thee.’

Rees Thomas gazed long and wistfully in Israel’s eyes, till his own overflowed, and his face became very sad. The head was then shaken, as if to say, ‘it could not be,’ and then bent low on his breast.

‘Live, live, my friend ! my second father !’ urged David. ‘Live for my sake and his ! Call upon the will and the faith thou hast so often and so wonderfully made use of !’

Presently the Deputy again looked up, and said inquiringly,

‘My wife ?’

‘Has gone before!’ said Israel, after a long and agitating pause.

‘And—the—boy?’

‘Is my care henceforth,’ said David, ‘He shall share, if need be, everything I possess in the world.’

Again the Deputy bent low his head, in silent and anguished self-communion.

A few seconds passed thus, before his eye again sought their faces.

‘Friends,’ he began, and his voice then told them his position was hopeless even to himself, and therefore probably fatal, ‘how I have loved you both, how striven for both—striven! ay, even with the Angel of God, as Jacob did in the desert, thou wilt hereafter know—and am I not now repaid? What is death? Can he banish you from me? Does he not even now feel we are conquerors over him—you and me? But—but—what was it I wanted to say? I get strangely forgetful. Where am I? The world surely gets darker as it gets older! Who spake? Why it was my wife. I wondered she did not come to me. Yes, dearest, it is all over now.

All! The suffering's past—the fruits all to come. Oh the rich harvest! You cannot hear me! Cannot understand me! Ah! is it so? That is hard to bear. Forgive me. I was always weak of frame, perhaps too of soul, and wanted some one to lean on. That has been my cross, I suppose. Did you not then know I was dying? But death is sweet with those you love. Tell Israel——'

What was to be told remained for death's ear only.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ISRAEL'S CHOICE.

ON reaching the surface once more, Israel and David found Mr. Griffith Williams waiting most anxiously their appearance.

The news of Israel's success had preceded him ; and in consequence there had been time to make arrangements for the special care of him and his son.

A grasp of the hand of Israel, then of that of David, said all that needed to be said as to the relations of Griffith Williams with both.

‘Come,’ he said, ‘my carriage waits for you, my wife waits for you, Nest waits for you. I entreat you to be silent, to let me have my own way. Everything is prepared for you. You can be nowhere else cared for so well.’

Israel hesitated a moment ; the revolution in things was too vast, too sudden for him to be able to comprehend it as he could wish, but a glance at David's emaciated face but earnest pleading eyes made him hesitate no more.

‘Be it as you please, Mr. Williams.’ He was about to ask a question concerning the Deputy, but Griffith Williams anticipated him :—

‘Everything that can be done to show how we all honour the memory of Rees Thomas and his wife shall be done. Rest assured of that. I have already given all necessary directions.

Israel's look of gratitude was sufficient answer. Then as the carriage drove slowly away, he and David reclining against each other, shut their eyes, and strove to regain a little of their lost strength and energy, if it were but enough to enable them to appreciate and enjoy the blessedness of so great a change.

Some days pass, and once more we are at the Farm, and in the darkened chamber.

Nest is there still, but better. David is on the

floor by her feet, and recounting his adventures, with pallid, thin, but most happy face.

A little removed from them, standing by the windows, are Griffith Williams and Israel engaged in a discussion just drawing to its end. It is Israel who now speaks :—

‘I give up the mine to you, since you say you are willing, for my sake, to take it with all its debts, responsibilities, and——’

‘Yes,’ said Griffith interruptingly, ‘I will do so, for your sake ; and not for that only, but also because I believe, with David’s help in bringing other capitalists to join, so that I may run no risks injurious to my family, the affair may still be made profitable, and the mine safe. You do not doubt that?’

‘Not in the least.’

‘That decides me. But of course you stay in the concern.’

‘You wish that?’

‘Wish it? I will not meddle on any other understanding.’

‘I am glad of this,’ said Israel, with a smile

that had positively grown sweet; 'for power demoralises us for subjection. With you I should not feel to bristle with pride whenever my toes were trodden on by my superiors; whereas——'

'What do you mean? I am not going to be the manager.'

'Neither am I.'

'Why, did you not just now consent?'

'I consented, and do again consent, with gratitude, to accept from you, if you will confer it on me, while you retain the power, my old post of Overman.'

'Overman! Israel, are you mad?'

'I have been mad, and worse than mad. But if I have indeed recovered sanity, this must be to me my first assurance of it, that you can safely confide to me the post I ask.'

'Israel!'

'Words are vain in this matter. I do not wish to roam through the world a friendless man. Let me stay here. I will do you all good service; but I swear to you these are my only terms. I

have had my opportunity, and have abused it ; let me pay the penalty.'

'You do not object to David's marrying Nest?'

'Not if you and she can bear to know without impatience he is my son.'

'That's settled then ; and they shall be married the instant she has entirely regained her health ; for I have a shrewd suspicion that the knowledge of this will wonderfully accelerate the process.'

'Farewell, then. I have made all necessary arrangements for the mine during my absence.'

'You are going away?'

'Yes, for a brief time. I need to be alone, and yet not alone. He, of whom David will tell you so much, goes with me—not in the flesh, but in the spirit. It seems to me I have learned nothing in a long life, and I do not wish to die with the same reproach on my soul.

'I take him and his one book, that he has carefully and formally bequeathed to me ; I need not tell you what book that is. I take these, and intend to try if there be any path open to one like

me out of the darkness and the slough of despond in which I stand. Farewell! I will find the way if I am yet the man I was—Israel Mort, Overman.'

APPENDIX.

THE Author of 'Israel Mort, Overman,' desires at the close of his work to offer a suggestion as to the most important of the steps remaining to be taken before the miner can realise the full beneficence, justice, and wisdom of Mr. Bruce's late measure, in the increased safety and wholesomeness of his labour.

In a matter involving such tremendous issues, occasional inspection is simply worthless, except to show at distant intervals of time the then general state of the mine. What the collier wants to know is—not what the government inspectors will think of his colliery at some future day, but whether on *this* day—*this* very hour—he can go on with his work in entire confidence, no matter in what part of the mine he may happen to be.

Let then the men of each mine elect from among themselves (certain preliminary qualifications being understood) three of their own number, from which

the employer shall choose one, to be a Men's Inspector ; and paid by the State, even if the State demand repayment from the mine-owners. Let this man have no other duty than that of constant examination on the collier's behalf as regards the safety of the mine, and its fitness for working in.

Let him have a Deputy, if there be night work, as it is believed is now generally the case, so that the watching and the labour may always go on together. Let his election be subject to the approval of the government inspector, who will have to be satisfied of his fitness. Let his powers be confined absolutely to that of free communication, whenever he wishes, with the officers of the mine, deputies, overmen, or agents, according to the importance of what he may have to say ; and in case he cannot satisfy them, to do what he thinks requisite, let him (if he considers the case sufficiently urgent) be empowered to demand the immediate attendance of the government inspector. In less important cases his reports would of course be examined at certain intervals by the government inspector, who would then act as he saw fit. Meantime the value of such reports, and the amount of attention paid to them by the mine officers, would become important elements of judgment for or against the employer in cases of calamity. Such a men's inspector would of course practically, in time, come to represent not only the men, but to some extent the inspector

appointed by government, and therefore it would only be reasonable to require he should not belong to a Trades Union.

Let our working colliers be thus guarded, *and to a great extent thrown on their own responsibility to show if aught be wrong in the matter of their safety* ; let the personal responsibility of the employer or his agent as demanded by the Act, be also systematically enforced, and there will soon be an end to mining accidents, except as calamities of the rarest kind.

It can hardly be necessary to urge how masters and workmen would be alike benefited by such an appointment:—it would infuse new life into the youth of every colliery, who would be emulous to obtain such a post, and educate themselves accordingly ; it would give the older men the feeling that they were respected, and so promote their own self-respect ; it would in all sorts of ways give a more genial tone to the mutual relation. As to the masters, such an appointment would virtually lessen their responsibility as honest men who wish to conduct the mine only on principles and methods consistent with safety and reasonable comfort for the workers, even while seemingly greater responsibilities are thrown upon them by the new legislation. Then, too, such an appointment, combined with the other recent measures of amelioration of mining life, and with the progress of practical science, would not only tend to spare employers the loss, alarm, and scandal

now excited by such regularly-recurring calamities (a thousand men a year killed for instance) but also to lessen the dislike of the occupation; and thus to do away with the greatest and ever-growing difficulty of mine-owners, that of finding a sufficient and permanently reliable supply of good and contented labourers.

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